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A FIERCE HAND-TO-HAND STRUGGLE WAS BEGUN. (Page 145.)

IN PIRATE WATERS

A TALE OF
THE AMERICAN NAVY

BY

KIRK MUNROE.

AUTHOR OF "THE WHITE CONQUEROR," "A VAIL WITH PONTIAC," "THROUGH SWAMP AND SWINE," "WITH CROCKETT AND BOWIE," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1898



Fig. 45. - The second struggle was begun. (Fig. 45.)

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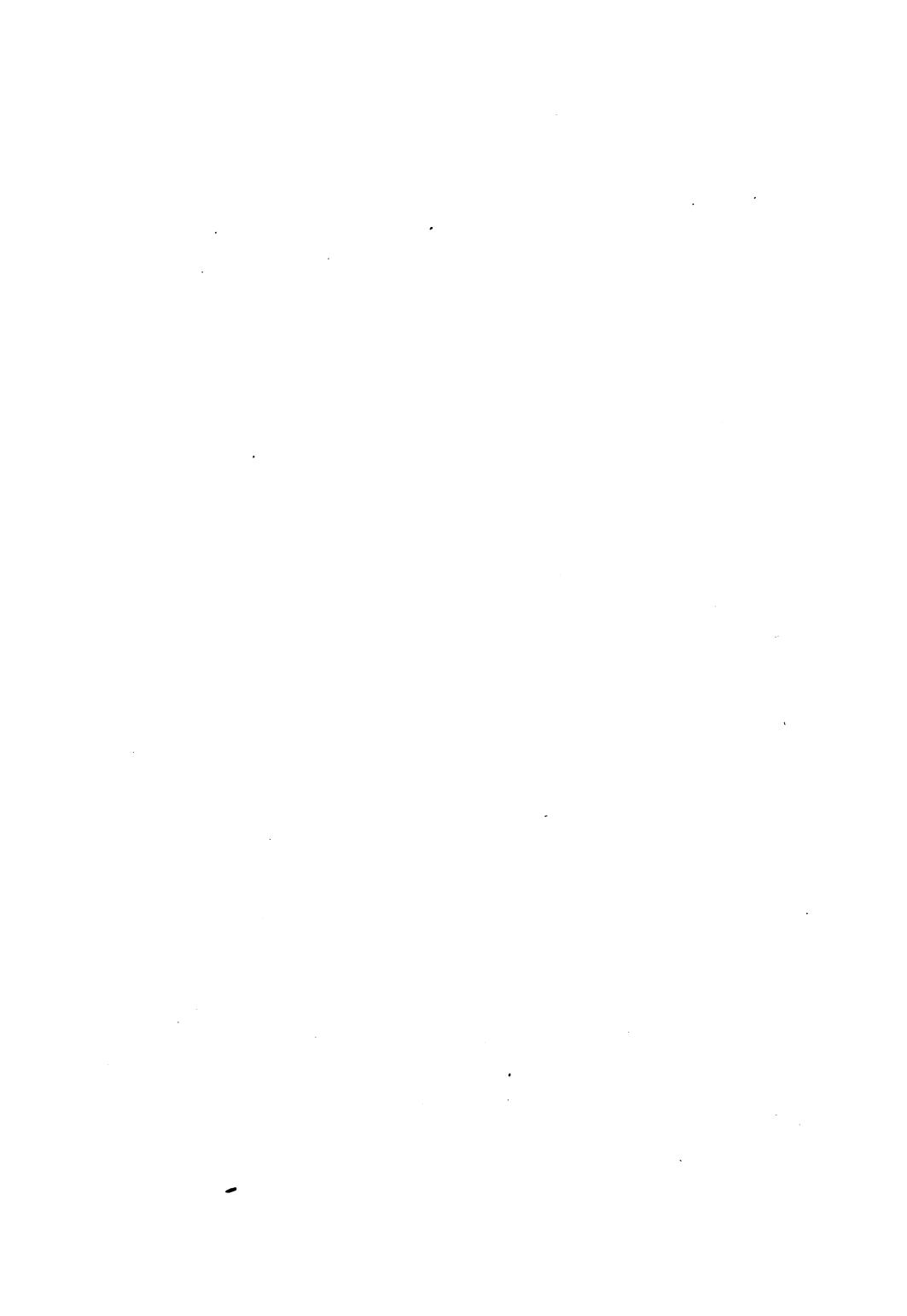
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IN PIRATE WATERS

CHAPTER I

WRECK OF THE GOOD SHIP "RICHARD"

To begin at the very beginning, our hero, William Nicholas Vance, was born on Christmas day of 1784, at Bonny Eagle, the gray stone farmhouse overlooking Long Island Sound, that had been occupied by his ancestors for three generations. On his father's side these ancestors had been soldiers, as well as farmers, taking an active part in all the colonial wars between Great Britain and France, while on his mother's side they had as invariably been sailors. Thus our youngster came by direct inheritance to a love for the sea and an admiration for deeds of daring which he longed to emulate. But alas! It seemed that he could never be either sailor or soldier, for he was a cripple.

At birth, and for a year afterwards, he was as sturdy a babe as ever crowded. Then he received a fall by which his spine was so injured that when he finally learned to walk it was with the aid of a tiny

crutch. Being thus used to a crutch from the very first, the boy handled it so skilfully that in many of their sports his young companions noted but little difference between him and them. He could not run so fast as they, it is true, nor did he learn to swim; but he could throw a stone or a ball with unerring aim, climb the tallest trees with the most daring of his mates, hang by the arms longer than any of them, and even pull himself up on a bar "chin high" with one hand, either right or left, three times in succession. Of course, this feat was prodigiously envied by every boy of Billy's acquaintance, since no one of them could accomplish it. Thus it will be seen that our lad was wonderfully strong in the arms, and could, in many instances, make them serve him in place of his weakened lower limbs.

Billy was also a better and more daring boatman than any of his young competitors, since he had been carefully instructed in the art of sailing by his chiefest crony, Martin Quarterman. This old sea-dog, having fought under the redoubtable Paul Jones and lost a leg in his country's service, now managed a small marine railway belonging to the Bonny Eagle estate, on which the fisher boats and light-draught coasters of that section were accustomed to haul out for repairs. Possibly the similarity of their misfortunes first drew the man and boy together. Certain it is that, by the time the latter was in his early "teens," they were inseparable friends, and Billy

was never happier than when listening to the stirring reminiscences of the old sailor, or diving into the mysteries of knotting, splicing, serving, or whipping.

Martin Quarterman carried his instructions in nautical matters farther than this by means of a small, but stanch and seaworthy boat that he had built for his own use and named *Richard*. Originally fitted with only a single sail, the *Richard* at various times underwent phenomenal changes of rig to suit the development of the young sailor to whom she served as an object lesson. Thus she had become in turn a sloop, a schooner, and at length blossomed forth as a brigantine, with yards and squaresails on her foremast. Nor was the ambition of her crew satisfied with even this remarkable spread of canvas; for Billy had hardly become familiar with the handling of yards and braces, clewing up, settling away, reefing and furling, than, to his immense delight, he one day found the frequently transformed craft equipped with a complete suit of tiny studding sails.

Martin had not intended these for actual use, but only for purposes of instruction, and when Billy declared that they must instantly put to sea to learn what she would do under this new canvas, he shook his head doubtfully. But the boy would not be denied and insisted so strenuously on carrying his point that finally the old sailor relented, and they set forth on the memorable voyage that ended in disaster ere they were half a mile from shore.

A sudden squall, a crew too short-handed to reduce the overpowering spread of canvas in time, and as a result Billy Vance was experiencing all the thrilling sensations of actual shipwreck; while old Martin endured the bitter pangs of mortification and self-reproach.

As the extraordinary appearance of the *Richard* had attracted general attention along shore, her entire crew were soon rescued from their embarrassing situation and borne safely to land. Neither of them cared to talk of what had just happened, and barely found words to thank their rescuers. Old Martin even carried his reticence so far that he would never afterwards speak of the distressing incident, save only to his youthful companion in misfortune. With him, however, he subsequently entered into most detailed and mutually satisfactory explanations of how and why it had all happened.

An immediate and melancholy effect of this misadventure was the summary ending of their experiments in practical seamanship, at least so far as Billy was concerned. Having lost his crutch when the *Richard* capsized, he was compelled to endure the humiliation of being carried home like a baby in a man's arms. When Mrs. Vance met him, full of alarm at his condition, and learned its cause, she then and there forbade him ever again to enter a boat of any kind so long as he lived. Then she put him to bed between hot blankets, and dosed him with such

a variety of bitter and scalding decoctions, that the poor boy finally expressed a regret at not having been drowned and done with it; at which Mrs. Vance exclaimed:—

“William Nicholas, I fear you are tainted with a perversity which I must attribute to the influence of that unregenerate old sailorman whom you have chosen for a companion. Therefore, I not only forbid you to enter a boat, but also insist that you shall never again visit the house of Martin Quarterman.”

Thus at one fell stroke was swept away our hero's two chiefest pleasures in life.

It may be as well to explain that the present Mrs. Vance was Billy's stepmother, his own mother having died soon after his birth. As his father was also dead, having been killed in the hunting field when his son was ten years of age, our boy was to all intents and purposes an orphan. Although his stepmother was rarely unkind to him, she resented his being a cripple, nor could she feel for him the loving sympathy of an own mother. Moreover, she was harassed by many cares and anxieties. Colonel Vance had left what was generally considered a fine property; but it had been so neglected during the late war, and so harried by both armies, as to have sadly deteriorated in productive qualities, and was now barely capable of supporting the little family dependent upon it. Fortunately there were but few of them, the only member besides Mrs. Vance and

Billy being Emily, the latter's half-sister, who was nearly three years his junior, and of whom he was devotedly fond.

Mrs. Vance feared and disliked the sea as much as her stepson loved it, and was glad of the good excuse afforded by the *Richard's* recent mishap to forbid Billy from again venturing upon it. Although the young sailor regarded this prohibition as the very cruelest thing that could have happened to him, he knew better than to argue the point with his stepmother and had been trained to an obedience that forbade him to disobey her. So he silently accepted the situation and at the earliest opportunity retired to "Maintop" for an uninterrupted consideration of its conditions.

Maintop was a rocky knoll within the limits of the Bonny Eagle property that commanded an extensive view of the Sound and also overlooked the Boston post road from New York. A clump of cedars, growing near its summit, afforded a complete concealment from any who might pass, and our crippled lad had spent more of his waking hours here than in any other one place. With infinite labor he had constructed for himself a tiny hut of stone walls, and a roof of branches. These were further overlaid with an old tarpaulin furnished by Martin Quarterman, who, with the exception of loyal little Emily, was the only person admitted to the secrets of the place.

Here the lad kept his choicest treasures, including his scanty possession of books, most of which dealt in some manner with the sea. In one carefully concealed recess, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, was his own mother's Bible and her miniature painted on ivory. Only Emily had ever been allowed to see these things which the boy considered as too sacred for even Martin Quarterman's eyes to rest upon.

Hidden with equal care in another part of the hut was a treasure that caused Billy's heart to swell with pride whenever he looked at or even thought of it. This was nothing more nor less than a quadrant such as is used by ship officers for obtaining altitudes. It had belonged to Martin Quarterman, who had taken it from a prize captured by a ship on which he was serving years before. While the honest fellow had no more knowledge concerning the use of such an instrument than he had of higher mathematics, he felt that its mere possession conferred a certain dignity. So he had clung to it through all the vicissitudes of his checkered career and had finally presented it to Billy Vance on the lad's fourteenth birthday, as the highest possible mark of his affection and esteem. Nor was the quadrant one whit less appreciated by its new owner than it had been by the old sailorman; and from the moment it came into his possession, Billy's chief ambition was to obtain a mastery of its mysteries. According to old

Martin, its brazen frame embodied the fundamental principles of navigation, and this was the one science that our lad longed to comprehend.

On Maintop, then, Billy Vance, sometimes accompanied by little Emily, spent many of his happiest hours. He never tired of gazing out over the blue waters of the Sound and pronouncing upon the character of the many white-winged craft constantly passing up or down its broad expanse. Most of them he knew were only coasters; but some he believed to be bound for the world's most distant ports, while occasionally he was thrilled by the sight of a tall frigate, which caused every nerve in his body to tingle with delight and longing.

His outlook, on the other hand, was almost equally interesting since it embraced a long sweep of the post road over which passed the mail coaches between New York and New England, private travelling-carriages, freight wagons, and in fact all the land traffic between what were at that time the two most populous sections of the country. Upon these things our imaginative lad mused and speculated with unflagging interest, since he was possessed of all the instincts of a traveller, and an intense longing to venture forth into the great world.

So it was to Maintop that Billy Vance retired upon being deprived by his stepmother of his two chief pleasures in life, and here, in solitary communion, he sat down to consider the situation.

CHAPTER II

A RESCUE FROM MAINTOP

AT first Billy could only see the darkest side of his affairs and could not restrain a flow of hot tears as he realized the full meaning of his stepmother's recent command. Never again set foot on a boat! Never again visit Martin Quarterman! Could anything be more distressingly cruel or destructive of his happiness than those two mandates? Without boats and without Martin, what did life hold of happiness for him? What did he care whether he lived or died? Thus thinking, the forlorn lad flung himself face downward on the ground and sobbed as though heartbroken.

Of course he would not for the world have any one see him thus, and when at length a gentle hand began to stroke his curly head, while a soft voice, that also held accents of tears, said pleadingly, "Don't cry, Billy; don't cry," he quickly gained a sitting posture and turned toward the intruder a face red with confusion.

But it was only Emily, the dear little sister, who, young as she was, had already proved his comforter in many an hour of pain and despondency. He did

not mind Emily, of course; in fact, he had been wishing for her at the very moment of her coming, and now he poured out all his woes into her sympathetic ear. The little girl listened patiently until the sorrowful recital was ended. Then she said:—

“It’s too bad, Billy; but I don’t believe she meant it quite all.”

“She said, ‘Never again get into a boat,’ and that means until I’m twenty-one, which seems almost ‘never,’ it’s so far off. As for poor old Martin, he’ll be dead long before that time, so I shall never see him again, either.”

Of course this was an obvious proposition to Emily, seeing that Martin was at that time nearly fifty years of age, while her brother was only fifteen, but there was still another view to be taken.

“She didn’t say that you mustn’t speak to him or that he couldn’t come and see you, did she?” queried the little girl.

“No, she didn’t,” cried the boy, his face brightening. “She said I wasn’t to go to his house, but not a word about his coming to mine. I never thought of that, but of course he can come here, if he only will. Would you mind running down and telling him that I want to see him awfully? Only if he comes, I guess he’d better keep out of sight of the house. And I say, Emily, wait a minute. I’ve just thought of the most splendid plan. We’ll invent a signal code, the same as Paul Jones used to have,

that nobody can understand but ourselves, and you shall help make the flags. You mustn't say a word about it, though; not even to Martin, for I want to tell him myself."

Promising absolute silence regarding this wonderful secret, Emily ran off on her errand, leaving Billy not only comforted, but happily planning out the great scheme with which he had just been inspired.

Martin Quarterman promptly obeyed the summons of his young friend, and, by keeping beyond range of the batteries, as he expressed it, managed to gain Maintop unobserved, which added a delightful air of mystery to the whole proceeding.

The old sailor was deeply grieved when he learned of the recent orders from the "Department," and declared a belief that if Mrs. Vance were only possessed of the true facts in the case, they would never have been issued. Then he explained all over again just how and why the accident to the *Richard* had happened, proving so conclusively that it was in no way the fault of her crew, but was just such a disaster as is liable at any time to overtake the largest ships under certain conditions, that Billy was greatly comforted. He even meditated taking Martin down to the house and having him there repeat his perfectly clear statement of the case. On second thoughts, however, he decided not to do so, since it was not certain that Mrs. Vance would wholly comprehend the strictly nautical terms used by the old

sailor. So he contended himself with outlining his great scheme of a signal code to be used between Maintop and "Galleyhead," as Martin's little place down by the shore was called, and it met with such instant approval that many of its more important details were arranged at once.

With his usual impetuosity Billy so hastened the carrying out of this new plan, that, on the very next day old Martin planted the necessary flagstaffs, and rigged them with halyards, while Emily sewed busily on the brightly colored flags, and her brother worked at the signal books.

The code that he invented was of course a very crude and simple affair, but it afforded an immense deal of pleasure combined with instruction, and there was not a day of the following month on which the gayly fluttering flags did not transmit important messages between Maintop and Galleyhead. Nor was our young sailor's interest in nautical matters allowed to slacken during this time; for although he could not go to sea, he became possessed of the beautiful model of a full-rigged ship over which Martin had labored in secret for more than a year. Billy regarded this as a marvel of ingenuity and cunning workmanship, as indeed it was.

Then, too, Martin obtained from one of the vessels that hauled out on his ways a nautical almanac, at that time an extremely rare and valuable publication. This he also presented to his pupil, and in

it Billy came face to face with logarithms, which he also discovered were connected in some unexplained way with the using of a quadrant.

With all this the lad never ceased to long for the motion of a boat, the pull of a sheet, and the feel of a tiller that in the hand of a born sailor sends such an ineffable thrill through every nerve. He longed to be once more afloat as the desert traveller longs for an oasis, or an exile longs for his home. At times, therefore, he became bitterly resentful not only of his mother's denial of his longings, but of his infirmity which, as he believed, debarred him from ever becoming a sailor or taking part in such gallant deeds as his soul loved. At such periods he always sought the refuge of Maintop, where little Emily generally found him and practised her simple arts of consolation. It was while emerging from one of these black hours and with Emily sitting close beside him, he was moodily gazing up the long stretch of post road visible from that point, that the incident occurred by which his whole life was changed.

“You will have the chance of doing brave deeds some day. I know you will,” Emily declared positively; “only you must learn to be very patient first, and that is the hardest of all.”

“I should think so,” answered the boy, bitterly, “and what's the good of it, anyway? Patience won't teach me to walk without a crutch nor give me the same chance that other fellows have.”

"It might," rejoined Emily, doubtfully. "At any-rate, it's a splendid thing to have, and it leads to most everything else. Mr. Percival said so last Sunday."

"What does Mr. Percival know about it?" asked the other, scornfully. "He's only a preacher, and couldn't sail a boat across a mill pond."

"He does know, though," affirmed Emily, stoutly. "I'm sure he does, because— Oh! Billy, look! What do you suppose is coming?"

The boy looked with languid interest in the direction indicated, and then his face brightened.

"A runaway team, I do believe," he cried, rising as he spoke, to gain a better view.

As the children watched the rapidly advancing cloud of dust it disclosed the outlines of two frantic horses running at top speed and whirling after them an open carriage.

"If they don't stop, what a smash they will make at the foot of Friar's Hill," exclaimed Billy, his face ablaze with the excitement.

The place thus designated was less than a quarter of a mile from Maintop, and at the foot of its steep declivity the road crossed a narrow stream by an unrailed wooden bridge. The bed of the stream was filled with boulders, many of which were now exposed to view by a low stage of water, and, as Billy foresaw, there must be a catastrophe at that point unless the runaway team should pause in its mad flight before reaching the brow of Friar's Hill. This

there was no prospect of their doing, for they came on like a whirlwind while the young spectators watched them with trembling fascination.

Suddenly Emily clutched her brother's arm. "Oh, Billy!" she cried, "there is some one in the carriage, and I do believe it is a little girl. See! She is standing up and holding on to the front seat. She will be killed! I know she will, for there is no one to save her. Oh, it is dreadful, and I can't bear it!"

With this, the child covered her face with her hands, closing both eyes and ears to the tragedy she believed about to be enacted before her.

As for the young descendant of soldiers and sailors, he stood for a moment irresolute, his face alternately flushing and paling. He glanced up and down the road. Not a soul was in sight save the helpless occupant of the on-rushing carriage. He had seen her and realized her peril even before Emily spoke, and now the white-clad figure seemed to stretch out her arms imploringly to him.

Only for a moment did young "Greatheart" hesitate. Then, without a word he sprang forward and began to descend the rugged slope of Maintop at a pace that would have outstripped many of his more able-bodied playmates. As he gained the road, the runaway team was so close at hand that he had only time to assure himself, by a swift glance, of the little girl's continued presence in the carriage, before it was upon him.

The frantic horses attempted to swerve to one side, but with the supremest effort of his life the young cripple leaped forward, dropped his crutch, and caught at a bridle. In an instant he was jerked from the ground with such violence that something in his back seemed to snap and his arms were nearly torn from their sockets. An agony of pain shot through his body, and he expected with each moment to be flung beneath the trampling iron-shod hoofs. At the same time the muscles of his arms seemed to harden into steel, and though dashed like a feather-weight from side to side, he still clung to that bridle with a grasp that could not be broken.

After a little the dragging weight of the boy began to tell, and though he was blinded, choked, and well-nigh crazed by the pain in his back, he still realized that the terrific pace was slackening. At the same time, little by little, the course of the runaways was deflected toward the side on which he hung until after what seemed to him an eternity of torment they plunged into a clump of bushes by the roadside and came to a standstill with the brow of Friar's Hill less than one hundred yards away.

A few minutes later, when two terror-stricken men, breathless with running, reached the scene, they found, close beside the reeking horses, two little girls bending with frightened faces over the senseless form of a lad who lay, begrimed and motionless, on the ground between them.

CHAPTER III

BILLY SETS FORTH INTO THE WORLD

THE younger of the two men who had followed the runaway team was in livery, and was evidently the driver. The other, a gentleman in middle life, of kindly face and fine presence, was Dr. Warburton Dean of Philadelphia, one of the most eminent surgeons of his day. Having been called to preside over a meeting of scientific men in New Haven, he had taken with him his only child Ruth, who was of an age with Emily Vance, and they were returning to their home by leisurely stages in their own carriage when the runaway that so nearly ended in disaster occurred.

Both Dr. Dean and his man had stepped from the carriage to examine a trifling defect in its rear axle, when a partridge, dashing with a loud whirr from the roadside, startled the horses into a run. Although both men had instantly followed with their utmost speed, the carriage quickly vanished from sight of the agonized father, leaving only a cloud of dust to mark its course.

After our lame lad's gallant and successful effort to stop the runaways, Emily was first to reach the

scene, where she found the young girl of the carriage bending over Billy's motionless form. She was saying to herself: "He is dead, and he died to save me. Oh, dear! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

She paid no attention to Emily's coming, but only repeated her moan over and over, while the other, equally dazed, stared at her brother's white face, in the silence of a grief too great for expression. When the men arrived, Dr. Dean, snatching Ruth to his heart, uttered a fervent prayer of thankfulness. The coachman, seeing that his young mistress was unharmed, naturally turned to his horses, and for a moment poor Billy lay unnoticed, save by Emily, who flung herself down beside him with passionate sobs.

Then Ruth, struggling from her father's arms, cried: "Look quick, papa, at this brave, splendid boy who stopped the horses, and don't let him die. He saved my life, and now you must save his."

Attention being thus called to the lad, Dr. Dean bent over him with anxious solicitude, and quickly discovered that he still breathed. At the same time he gathered from the little girls an idea of the obligation under which this boy had placed him.

"But he seems to be lame," said the Doctor, with a puzzled expression; "and if so, how could he stop a runaway team?"

"He is lame," replied Emily, "and has never walked without a crutch; but he didn't mind that one bit. He just ran so fast that I couldn't catch

him, and jumped at the horses' heads and held on until they stopped."

"Yes, he did," corroborated Ruth, "and when they were trying to kill him, he looked back at me and smiled. I think he is the very nicest boy I ever knew, and just wish he was my brother."

"I'm glad he isn't," quickly retorted Emily, "for then he wouldn't be mine."

"It was one of the bravest acts in man or boy that I ever heard of," said Dr. Dean, his voice trembling with emotion, "and I pledge myself, with God's help, to so recompense him for this day's work, that he shall never have cause to regret what he has just done."

All this time the Doctor had been making a rapid but careful examination of Billy's body in search of fractured bones, and had thus gained a fair insight into the lad's condition. Now, learning from Emily that Bonny Eagle was only a short distance from where they were, he caused the young hero to be gently lifted into the carriage, which he and the two little girls also entered, for conveyance to the Vance homestead. Their arrival at the farmhouse caused consternation among its inmates; but Dr. Dean's decisive words and air of authority quickly restored order, and he soon had his patient in bed, where the lad gradually struggled back to a consciousness of his surroundings.

That evening the Doctor held a long consultation with Mrs. Vance, which he began by saying:—

"Madam, it is my firm conviction that, as a result of this day's splendid bravery, your son may be restored to a complete use of his limbs."

"How can that be possible, sir, when he has been a cripple from earliest infancy?"

"Simply as a result of treatment so heroic that no surgeon would dare prescribe it, and which would prove fatal in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Your son's spine was injured by the fall which you say he received while still a babe. By the lapse of years, that injury had attained such permanence of character, that any ordinary effort to overcome it would probably have resulted in fracture and death. And yet the desired condition was obtained to-day, when, seizing the bridle of that runaway horse, his spinal column was subjected to such a sudden and violent shock as restored it to the normal. Now a slight operation, together with a long period of rest and gradually increased exercise, will, under God's favor, enable your son to throw away his crutches forever. The brave fellow has this day placed me under an obligation that I can never repay in full, but I believe that I can render him a service that will partially cancel my indebtedness. I therefore seek your permission to take him with me to Philadelphia, place him in a hospital that is under my supervision, and there use such skill as I may possess for his cure."

"I fear that I cannot afford the expense," faltered *Mrs. Vance.*

“ My dear madam ! ” exclaimed the Doctor, “ I am certain that the question of expense never entered your boy’s head when he undertook to save my daughter’s life. Can you then imagine that I would give it a thought in connection with restoring to him the use of his limbs ? No, madam, there will be no expense, but only a debt of gratitude which I shall owe to you in case you see fit to grant my request.”

Of course there could be but one answer to so generous an offer, and the Doctor’s proposition was gratefully accepted. When, on the following morning it was unfolded to Billy, the boy was at first bewildered by the prospect thus opened before him. Then he became filled with an eager impatience to set forth on the wonderful journey, and despite the great pain which he still endured would willingly have started at once. But his new-found friend explained that at least three days of absolute rest were necessary before he could be moved with safety. There were also preparations to be made that would fully occupy that length of time.

So the high-strung and naturally active lad resigned himself with what patience he could command to the stipulated period of confinement, while Dr. Dean, leaving Ruth to the joyous companionship of Emily, visited New York to arrange for the transfer of his young patient.

Although the time of waiting had seemed long in anticipation, there was so much to think of and to

plan for that it passed with amazing swiftness. First of all, was the thought that he was to be made well and strong like other boys. This, however, was too stupendous a fact to be realized or appreciated all at once. Besides, it was something of the future and overshadowed in importance by the journey that was to intervene before it could be accomplished; for, one hundred years ago, it was considered as great an undertaking to travel one hundred miles from home, as it now is to cross the Atlantic. But few lads of our hero's age travelled at all, and to him the world ten miles beyond Bonny Eagle was unknown save through books and the tales of Martin Quarterman.

Then there were the playmates to whom he must bid good-bye; for he was to be gone a whole year, and they would be almost grown up before he should see them again. These, oppressed by an unusual constraint and shyness, were admitted to his room one or two at a time, and, as they awkwardly tiptoed to his bedside, evidently regarded him as already far removed from their every-day life. They almost whispered in speaking to him, and were so painfully embarrassed in both speech and action that it was a relief to have them depart.

It still remained to give instructions regarding pets and cherished properties that must be left behind, as well as to make a selection of what might be taken. Among the things that *must* accompany him, Billy named the secret treasures of Maintop, as well as his

ship, his books, and the signal flags. He also stipulated that Martin Quarterman should accompany him on his journey. Of course this request was granted, since nothing was now refused the young hero who was so soon to take his departure.

While all these things were being arranged at Bonny Eagle, Dr. Dean had engaged in New York a second comfortable travelling-carriage, and on the evening of the third day this arrived at the Vance homestead.

Early the next morning, the crippled lad, borne by two men, on an improvised canvas stretcher, was conveyed to this carriage, where he was made comfortable by many pillows. Then he bade farewell to Emily, who wept bitterly, to his stepmother, who told him that never until that moment had she known how truly she loved him, to such of his young companions as were gathered to witness his departure, to his home, and to his boyhood.

That night was spent in Faunce's Tavern, then the most famous hostelry in New York City, and poor Billy did not get one wink of sleep, on account of the exciting novelty of his surroundings. So, on his account, the travellers rested there all the following day, and our lad gazed for hours from the window of his room at the shipping which lined the city wharves or swung at anchor in the upper bay.

When the journey was resumed, there came a treat that was still rarer. The carriages were embarked

on a slow-sailing ferry barge for conveyance across the bay, and up the Kill van Kull to Elizabethport in New Jersey. During the voyage, Billy actually passed within a biscuit toss of the splendid frigate *Constitution*, recently launched, and with all her glorious record of achievement yet to make.

After taking the road again, two days and a half were required to reach Philadelphia, at that time the capital of the United States. Here our young traveller was found to be so exhausted by his journey that it was deemed best to take him at once to the hospital which was to be his home for many tedious months.

CHAPTER IV

AN UGLY DUCKLING AND TWO NAVAL SWANS

THE time passed by Billy Vance in that hospital was tedious enough to one of his temperament, but the weariness was not without compensations. At first, and after old Martin had returned to Bonny Eagle, the poor boy was very homesick and lonely, in spite of the daily visits and devoted kindness of Dr. Dean and Ruth. Then, when he was rested from his journey, came the dreaded operation which he bore without a murmur, though holding all the while the hand of brave little Ruth, whom he had begged to stand by him during the trying ordeal. After that came a long period of weakness, when he could not even sit up in bed, before his strength began to return.

While he was convalescing, and beginning once more to take an interest in life, a great grief came to him in the loss of his dearest friend and constant visitor; for, in company with an aunt, Ruth sailed for Europe, where she was to be educated. When she visited him for the last time, Billy shyly slipped into her hand the half of a silver dollar bearing the date of 1793, which was the year of the first coinage of American money.

With infinite patience he had cut this coin in two and bored a small hole in each half. On the one intended for Ruth he had scratched the letter "V." and on the other, which he proposed to retain, the letter "D." Now he begged Ruth to keep her bit of coin as faithfully as he should keep his until (D. V.) they should meet again, and this the girl promised to do. Then she impulsively bent over his bed, kissed him good-bye, and, running away with a crimsoned face, Billy saw her no more.

After that, to beguile the long hours of his confinement, the young would-be sailor devoted much time to nautical matters, stripping and re-rigging his ship, puzzling over his quadrant and the pages of his nautical almanac, revising his signal code, for which purpose Dr. Dean caused a little mast provided with halyards to be stepped beside his bed, and reading such scraps of sea-news as were printed in the scanty columns of the *American Advertiser*, which, published in Philadelphia, was the first daily paper ever issued in the United States.

Here the boy devoured with avidity every item concerning the naval war that his country was then waging with France on account of the unbearable depredations of French privateers on American commerce, and gloried over every victory gained by United States vessels almost as though he had taken part in the engagements. He knew by heart every reported detail concerning the capture of the French

frigate *L'Insurgent* by the United States frigate *Constellation*, as well as of the destruction of a score of French privateers by the American squadron cruising in West Indian waters; and, while his heart swelled with pride at each stirring tale of his countrymen's daring, it was also filled with an ever-increasing longing to share in their gallant deeds.

One day, after he had been for several months in the hospital, and had gained such strength that he was permitted to sit in an easy chair placed close beside his bed, his attention was attracted by an unusual stir near the doorway. Glancing in that direction, his heart leaped within him, as did that of the "Ugly Duckling" at first sight of a swan; for, advancing directly toward him, he saw two young naval officers wearing the uniform of their rank.

As these young men, filled with life and strength, bronzed from recent service beneath tropic skies, resolute in bearing, and wearing the air of command inseparable from those who exercise authority over their fellows, moved down the long ward, they cast pitying glances at the occupants of the little white beds on either side.

Suddenly one of them exclaimed: "By Jove, Decatur! Look over there. If that isn't the signal to prepare for action, then I'm a marine."

"It certainly is," replied the other; "for, though I don't claim to be as well up in my code as you are,

that is a familiar signal to every man in the American navy. But who can have raised it? I didn't know that any of our chaps were drydocked here besides poor Elliot."

"Nor I; but let us find out."

So the two handsome young fellows, in their fine uniforms, halted beside poor, white-faced Billy Vance and regarded him curiously.

"A truly nautical display," remarked the younger, in a low tone, as he noted the full-rigged ship with her canvas hanging loosely in brails ready to sheet home. "A quadrant, too, as I'm a sinner, and a set of signal flags; but I don't remember ever to have seen this young admiral before; do you, Andrew?"

"No, I do not," replied the other. Then, turning to Billy, he asked courteously: "May I inquire who you are my lad, and if you belong to our service, as your surroundings would seem to indicate?"

"My name is Vance," answered the boy, trembling with delight at being noticed by these superior beings, "and I am not in the service, though I wish with all my heart that I was; that is, if you mean the naval service of the United States."

"Of course I do," laughed the officer, "since that is *the service* par excellence to all loyal Americans, and I applaud your desire to enter it. I may add that you seem in a fair way to accomplish your purpose, provided you are not disabled beyond hope of repair. Is this ship your handiwork?"

“No, sir. She was built by an old sailor named Quarterman. But—”

“Not Martin Quarterman of the *Bonhomme Richard*?” queried the elder officer, eagerly.

“Yes, indeed, and he lost a leg in her action with the *Serapis*.”

“I know him well, bless his dear old figurehead. If he has taught you seamanship, you must be well instructed. But what were you going to say further about your ship?”

“Only that I have just stripped and re-rigged her, giving her a whole new set of topgallant sails and royals.”

“Why did you do that?”

“Because the old ones were so narrow in the head, that I feared she might be taken for a Frenchman.”

“Good enough!” cried both officers, delightedly, while one of them added, “That’s exactly what we did to the old *Surgent*, when we changed her flags. *L’Insurgent*, I mean; possibly you may have heard of her.”

“I should say I had!” cried Billy, “and if I had been aboard the *Constellation* in that fight, I think I would be proud enough to die right off.”

“Perhaps,” rejoined the other, dryly, “though some persons don’t feel that way. For my own part, I know that I was mightily proud to find myself alive, when it was all over.”

"Why, sir! were you there?" asked Billy, in breathless eagerness.

"I was."

"Really! Then won't you please tell me your name?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vance, for not having done so sooner. It is Sterrett."

"Lieutenant Andrew Sterrett who commanded the third division of guns on board the *Constellation*?" asked Billy, quickly.

"The very same, and your humble servant to command," replied the officer, with a bow; "but I must say that I am surprised at the accuracy of your information."

"The whole account was in the paper, where I read it, and reread it, until I knew, or thought I did, just where every man stood. But,"—here Billy blushed at his own audacity,—"this other gentleman; is he also an officer of the *Constellation*?"

"No," laughed Sterrett; "he hasn't that honor; but is compelled by hard luck to serve on board a little old packet of which even you have probably never heard mention. Permit me to introduce my friend, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, of the frigate *United States*."

"Oh!" gasped Billy, "the frigate that sailed all around the *Thetis* and then went to the southward and captured a whole fleet of privateers. I guess I do know her. And I know of Mr. Decatur, too; only I thought he was a midshipman."

"So he was until a week ago," replied Sterrett, "and to-day he is airing his lieutenant's uniform, for the first time."

"And came to see me in it," murmured Billy, in an awed tone. "I think that was awfully good of him, and in you, too, Mr. Sterrett. I can't imagine, though, how you ever knew of me or found out where I was, unless," he added brightening, "Martin Quartermen told you. Have you really seen him?"

"Well, no. That is, not lately; and, to tell the truth, Mr. Vance, our visit to the hospital this morning was not made wholly on your account. The fact is, by some strange oversight, we had not been informed that you were here, and only came to inquire after the health of a brother officer who was brought here to be cured of a stubborn wound, and who occupies a private room on this floor. As we could not be admitted to him at once, we were passing the time of waiting by walking through the ward, and had the good fortune to be attracted by your signal flags. Now that you are informed as to our personality, perhaps you won't mind telling us something about yourself, since I can assure you that our curiosity is aroused by your nautical environment and evident knowledge of naval affairs."

Thus encouraged, Billy poured out his whole heart to these new-found friends. So that by the time Dr. Dean entered the ward to inform them that they

might now visit their wounded comrade, the officers had gained a fair idea of his circumstances, present condition, and ambitions. After they had bidden him good-bye, the elder of the two remarked to Dr. Dean:—

“It seems to me, sir, that you have in that lad a most interesting and rather remarkable patient.”

“I am glad you think so,” answered the Doctor, “for that is my own belief. I will now confess that I purposely caused you to be delayed that you might discover Billy Vance for yourselves, and form an unbiassed opinion concerning him. Since you have done so, I will further acknowledge a strong desire to get him into the navy, and beg your influence in his behalf.”

“But is he not a cripple?” suggested Sterrett.

“He was; but thanks to his own splendid bravery, he is no longer one, and within two months’ time he will be walking as well as you or I.”

“In that case,” replied the lieutenant, “you may count on my hearty coöperation to get him into our service.”

“And mine,” cried Decatur; “for I would ask no better shipmate than just such a fearless young chap as this lad seems to be. If he only had a knowledge of navigation including the use of instruments, it would help amazingly in securing an appointment.”

“So it would,” agreed Sterrett; “why can’t we

get Elliot to teach him while they are both lying here in limbo?"

"Good idea! We'll ask him at once."

"But don't say anything about the appointment until it is secured," continued the doctor; "for if the boy knew of our efforts to secure it, and it should fail to come after all, he would be terribly cut up."

Agreeing to this, the two officers went in to see Elliot, whose interest in their new protégé was so successfully aroused, that he readily consented to instruct the lad in the rudiments of navigation.

Thus it happened that the very first walk without crutches ever undertaken by Billy Vance was into the room of the wounded officer who was to teach him how to use his beloved quadrant. In that strange schoolroom the boy was quickly initiated into the mysteries of logarithims, and proved himself so apt at mathematics that ere two months were ended he had made wonderful progress in the art of seamanship.

At the same time his physical strength was so rapidly restored that inside of the time limit set by Dr. Dean he was able to walk for hours in the hospital grounds without becoming unduly fatigued.

While he thus gained mental and physical strength his instructor became daily weaker, until finally the lessons came to an end, and a few days later the name of Elliot was stricken from the register of

the United States Navy. He died as he had lived, bravely and cheerfully, at the same time comforted by the knowledge that he had helped give his country a defender worthy to take the place he was about to vacate.

CHAPTER V

THE HAPPY RUSTLE OF A COMMISSION

ON the day after the funeral of his instructor, Billy was invited by Dr. Dean to take a stroll through the hospital grounds. As they walked, and talked of the lad's future, they approached a broad ditch filled with water over which there was at that point no means of passing. Here, dropping a pace behind his companion, the Doctor performed the extraordinary act of tossing his own hat into the air. A brisk breeze blowing at the time carried it across the ditch, and as it landed on the opposite side its owner uttered a comical exclamation of dismay. Within a minute Billy had cleared the ditch with a flying leap, picked up the hat, and, returning in the same manner, handed it to its owner, with a bow.

“Well done!” cried the Doctor. “That performance gives the proof for which I have been waiting of your complete recovery. My dear boy, I do congratulate you with all my heart upon having fully regained the use of your limbs. From this moment you need no longer remain an inmate of the hospital, and I desire that you pack all your belongings at once for removal to my house. I say ‘at once,’ be-

cause I have invited some friends to dine with us to-night and help celebrate this happy event."

The joy with which Billy hastened to obey this command was not unmixed with regrets at leaving the place in which he had suffered and gained so much. There he had not only recovered the use of his limbs, but he had learned the greatest of all lessons,—that of patience. During the year spent there he had passed from boyhood into young manhood, acquired a knowledge of navigation, and gained a fair insight into surgery and the practice of medicine. He had also formed warm friendships that must now be broken up, and when a carriage finally arrived to convey him to the house of his benefactor, our usually merry lad was in a very thoughtful and sober frame of mind.

At the doorway of the Dean house, which was a fine residence standing in its own grounds within a square of Independence Hall, the expected guest was met by the Doctor himself, and immediately conducted to his room. As they entered it, the latter said: "I want you to grant me a favor, William. You have so often expressed a wish to enter the naval service, that I have become anxious to see how you will look in uniform. So I have taken the liberty of procuring a midshipman's suit that was made for a young friend of mine who is about your size, and shall be gratified if you will try it on."

"Of course I will, sir, if you desire me to," replied

Billy, whose eye had been caught as he entered the room by the uniform suit outspread upon his bed.

“I do, and will await your appearance downstairs. Dawson here will not only help you to dress, but will show you where to find me.”

With this the Doctor retired, closing the door behind him, and leaving Billy alone with Dawson, whom he already knew, since the latter had been driver of the runaway team upon the occasion of the first meeting between the Vances and the Deans. Now Dawson not only warmly congratulated the lad upon his restoration to health, but highly complimented his appearance as he donned article after article of the brand-new midshipman’s uniform.

“I declare, sir,” he said, as Billy finally buckled on a shiny belt from which depended a dirk. “It’s my opinion that if you was in the service you wouldn’t meet aboard any ship a finer-looking young gentleman than yourself.”

“I only wish I were in it,” replied the lad, trying to ignore the flattery of this “speech, but flushing with pleasure at it, nevertheless. “It’s a lucky beggar that this suit was made for, and I’d give a pretty penny to stand in his shoes. Do you know who he is, Dawson ?”

“Haven’t an idea, sir;” lied the man, solemnly, winking to himself as he did so ; “but whoever he is, these clothes won’t fit him any better than they do you, that’s certain. Now, sir, if you are ready, let

us go down, for the Doctor is a gentleman as don't like to be kept waiting when his heart is set upon a thing, like it is on seeing you in uniform."

"All right. Lead the way, and I'll follow; for the sooner I get out of these togs, the better, seeing they aren't mine. I begin already to feel like the jackdaw in stolen plumage."

As Dawson threw open the door of a large, brilliantly lighted room and announced, in a loud voice, "Mr. William Vance," poor Billy stood for a moment confounded. To him the room seemed filled with naval officers in uniform, all of whom had risen and stood with eyes turned expectantly in his direction. His embarrassment was, however, almost instantly relieved by Dr. Dean, who stepped forward, took him by the arm, and faced the assembled company, saying:

"Gentlemen, allow me to present to you one of my most valued friends and a brother officer in your glorious service,—Midshipman Vance, of the United States navy. As he has not heretofore been aware of the honor won by his own bravery, fortitude, and application, will you further allow me the great pleasure of reading to him the warrant that gives him a place in your ranks?"

Here the Doctor read, in clear tones, the formal paper by which William Nicholas Vance, a loyal citizen of the United States, was commissioned as midshipman in the naval service of his country. The commission was also accompanied by an order instruct-

ing the newly appointed midshipman to join the schooner of war *Enterprise*, commanded by Lieutenant Andrew Sterrett, and attached to the squadron of observation then fitting out under Commodore Richard Dale for a cruise in the Mediterranean. The commission was signed by John Adams, President of the United States, and by Benjamin Stoddert, first Secretary of the American Navy.

When the reading of these papers was finished a hearty cheer broke from the assembled guests, to whom Dr. Dean had given an account of Billy's brave deed while he was still a cripple. Then they pressed forward to congratulate him and welcome him as a brother officer. The first to grasp his hand was the veteran Captain Dale; then followed his friends Stephen Decatur and Andrew Sterrett, Lieutenants Stewart, Somers, and Porter, and Midshipmen Joseph Bainbridge and James Biddle.

In the mean time poor Billy, dazed, bewildered, and yet filled with an undreamed of happiness, knew not what to say or how to act until at length he found himself seated at a superbly appointed banquet table. Here he occupied a position at Dr. Dean's left hand, while Captain Dale sat at the host's right.

Then the lad found an opportunity to ask his benefactor, in a low tone, if the uniform he was wearing had really been intended for him.

“Certainly it was,” replied the Doctor, his face beaming with pleasure. “I had it made for you by

the best tailor in the city, and only hope that it is satisfactory."

"How can I ever thank you, sir?" faltered the young midshipman, to whom his uniform was a more tangible evidence of his gratified ambition than even the commission that rustled in his breast pocket with each deep-drawn breath of happiness.

"Don't try, my dear boy," answered the Doctor. "Only wear it out honorably in your country's service, and I shall be better pleased than with all the words of thankfulness you could frame in a lifetime."

So the joyous banquet proceeded until the time for toasts and speechmaking arrived, when Captain Dale replied in suitable terms to the first toast of the evening, which was, of course, the President of the United States. The honor of answering for "Our Navy" was granted to the dashing Decatur, who, while eulogizing the brave sailors who had already inscribed their names on its roll of honor, declared that the ships of that day were filled with men quite as brave, fully as anxious to perform heroic deeds, and every bit as ready to give their lives to their country.

As Billy Vance listened, flushed and trembling with excitement, to the speaker's glowing words, he knew that they had the ring of honest metal, and that the handsome young fellow who uttered them would ever be foremost in facing danger at duty's call. While our lad was thus thrilled by Decatur's eloquence, he was almost equally attracted by Lieutenant

Richard Somers, who sat nearly opposite him, calm and self-contained, but with mobile features that seemed illumined by flashes of inward light, and Billy felt that he too would enroll his name among those of the country's heroes if ever a chance was given him.

Finally came the toast, "Our guest and latest acquisition. He has bravely won his spurs. Long may he live to wear them in the nation's service"; and almost before Billy realized that he was the person thus indicated, he found himself on his feet gazing blankly at the wildly cheering assemblage which he was expected to address. For five minutes he stood there, but what he said or whether he even opened his mouth he never knew. He was only conscious that at intervals there came bursts of laughter and cries of "Hear! Hear!" while in after years he was treated by mischievous messmates to a dozen different versions of the great speech that he made on being introduced to the navy. With his first return of consciousness he found himself again safely seated, and joining with a hearty will in the applause that rewarded his maiden effort.

Finally the notable dinner was ended, and its guests departed; but before Lieutenant Sterrett left he gave our young midshipman his first order, which was to report on board the *Enterprise* in the morning. So the great day was merged into its morrow; and as Billy Vance tumbled into bed, he felt that it had been the proudest and happiest of his whole life.

CHAPTER VI

“COME ON BOARD, SIR”

AT breakfast the following morning, Billy learned from Dr. Dean how his appointment had been secured, of the letters written in his behalf by Sterrett and Decatur, both to Mrs. Vance to obtain her consent, and to the Secretary of the Navy urging his qualifications for the coveted position. “Aided by such influence,” concluded the Doctor, “I was so certain of success that I took the liberty of ordering your uniforms even before the commission was received.”

“How good you have been to me!” cried Billy.

“Nonsense. You will find that it is generally those deserving good things who get them. With the little I have been able to do for you our account is by no means evenly balanced, nor can it ever be. But we were talking of uniforms; and I want to add that on board the *Enterprise* you will find a chest marked with your name, containing a sea-outfit suitable to your position. In your new career I feel certain that you will perform like a brave and honest gentleman every duty that presents itself, always upholding your country’s honor and your own in face

of the whole world. Now, loath as I am to part with one who has endeared himself to me until he seems like an own son, I must even hasten your departure, since the hour approaches in which you were ordered to report on board your ship. I will only add, therefore, that in case you should make application for a month's leave of absence in which to visit your home, the request will doubtless be granted, as I understand the Mediterranean squadron is not to sail before spring."

Shortly after this, having bade his benefactor a most affectionate farewell, Billy made his way to a point on the river front, at which he had been told a boat from the *Enterprise* would meet him. He had barely time to cast an admiring glance at the saucy topsail schooner lying in the stream and displaying the stars and stripes from her main gaff, before a boat, manned by six stalwart blue-jackets, and commanded by a young officer, in whom Billy was delighted to recognize Midshipman Biddle, dashed up to the landing-stage.

"Hello, Vance!" cried the young fellow. "Glad you are on hand and didn't keep us waiting, for it's beastly cold on the water this morning. So, tumble in and let's get aboard. Now, men, look sharp! Oars. Toss. Let fall. Give way altogether. Steady, steady. Have a care, number two. Remember that the eyes of your countrymen — No levity, number six. Douse that grin if you don't want your grog

stopped. Well, Vance, what do you think of the little hooker out there? Pretty tidy craft, eh? There isn't anything in her class can outfoot her, nor a ship of twice her size that can whip her. *Enterprise* is her name, and she's full of it. The men call her the 'Prize,' and she surely is one. Well, here we are. Way enough! Toss. Stand by with your boathook, number one. Now then, Vance, follow me, please. Strict rule of the service, you know, for juniors to enter a boat first and leave it last. So, as I'm your senior, you'll have to follow in my wake. First time I was ever shipmate with a junior, and I've been in the service nearly a month, too. Makes me feel ancient, 'pon my word."

The lively chap had rattled on in such a fashion, that Billy had not found an opportunity of asking any of the innumerable questions that he longed to have answered. So he had contented himself with a happy gazing at the beautiful craft before them. His heart swelled with pride as he noted her fine lines, lofty spars, accurately furled sails, and glistening paint. She was to be his floating home, and he already regarded her as in a measure a personal possession.

As he followed his senior up the side ladder, the marine on sentry duty at the gangway presented arms. Biddle returned the salute with an offhand carelessness indicating an easy familiarity with such formalities. To Billy Vance, however, the affair

was one of vast importance, seeing that this was the first official mark of respect accorded to his new position. So he saluted in turn with a stiff precision that caused broad grins to appear on several faces among the spectators. In another moment, Biddle was reporting to Lieutenant Porter, who was officer of the deck: "Come on board, sir, and have brought Mr. Vance, as ordered."

"Very good, Mr. Biddle. You may hoist in your boat, as we shall shortly drop down the river. Mr. Vance, I am happy to welcome you on board the *Enterprise*. You will find Captain Sterrett in his cabin, where you may report to him in person. Orderly, announce Mr. Vance to Captain Sterrett. Boatswain, pipe all hands to make sail."

Thus dismissed by the busy lieutenant, Billy followed the orderly to the captain's cabin, noting, with delight, the snowy deck, the gleaming brass work, and the great guns under their snug-fitting tarpaulins, as he went. At the same moment he was thrilled by the shrill call of the boatswain's whistle, which he now heard for the first time.

The young commander of the schooner received him most kindly, though with a certain formality that had not been noticeable in their previous intercourse, and at once asked him if Dr. Dean had advised his making application for a month's leave.

"Yes, sir, he did," replied Billy, who was not at all certain that he cared to relinquish the delights of his

new life just at present, even to visit his home. "But if I am needed here, I can stay as well as not."

"We shall probably need you more after you become accustomed to your new duties, than we do now," laughed the other, "and, as you will quickly discover, a leave of absence is not to be had every month in the year. So I would advise you to take one while you can get it. Here is a blank form that you may fill out, for me to sign and forward to the Department. Now let us step on deck, for I hear them getting up anchor."

On deck our young sailor was fascinated by the orderly confusion of the busy scene. Forward the capstan was manned, and was steadily reeling in the cable to the shrill music of a fife. The great mainsail was already set, the foresail was rising swiftly and steadily, as a score of men walked away with its halyards. Topmen were aloft, loosing the snowy square sails, while in every direction officers were shouting orders, and men springing to obey them.

"Anchor's apeak, sir."

"Break it out and up with it. Forestay sail and jib. Starboard your helm. Hard a starboard. There she heels. Steady; now we're off."

Billy had hardly breathed with the excitement and joy of it all; and it was not until he found himself below, in company with his friend Biddle, that it occurred to him to ask whither they were bound and how long the cruise was likely to last.

"About a week, I should say," laughed the other, "since we are only running down the river with supplies for the *Philadelphia*, which awaits our coming somewhere inside the capes."

"Oh!" cried Billy, in a disappointed tone. "I was in hopes we were going to sea after some French frigate."

"Were you ever on board a frigate?" asked Biddle, with a grin.

"No."

"I thought not. After you have been, just tell me what show you think she would have in a fight with the good schooner *Enterprise*."

"But," persisted Billy, "when we cruise to the Mediterranean we are going after Frenchmen, aren't we?"

"I'm not quite sure, but I don't think so. In fact, I believe we are only going to take a squint at some of the black pirates of the North African coast."

"African pirates!" exclaimed Billy. "What have we to do with such chaps?"

"Only to suggest that, as we are paying them a lot of money to let us alone, we want them to be a little more considerate of our feelings, and not destroy more than one in every two of our merchantmen."

"Now I know you are quizzing," said the other, "for of course I know that this country wouldn't do such a shameful thing as to buy the good will of a lot of niggers."

“We are doing it, though.”

“I can’t believe it.”

“Very well, then, I’ll have to lick you until you can,” cried Biddle, springing to his feet and aiming a blow at his junior’s head, which the latter cleverly dodged.

Ere it could be repeated, and before Billy could deliver one in return, both lads were startled by a deep voice exclaiming:—

“Young gentlemen, what is the meaning of this? You are not fighting, I hope.”

“No, sir. That is, not yet,” stammered Biddle, turning a flushed face toward Lieutenant Porter, who had just entered the room.

“But you were going to?”

Both lads maintained a confused silence.

“What caused you to so far forget yourself, Mr. Biddle?”

“He called me a liar, sir, and I thought the honor of the service —”

“Can it be possible, Mr. Vance, that you are guilty of such an offence?”

“I did not mean to be, sir; but when he asserted that a lot of African pirates were being paid by this country to let our ships alone, instead of getting the thrashing they deserved, I could not believe it.”

“It is true, nevertheless,” rejoined the lieutenant, with a slight flush on his manly face, “and so I insist that you make instant apology to Mr. Biddle for doubting his word.”

"Certainly, I will, sir, and I hope he will forgive me," cried Billy, at the same time holding out a friendly hand, which was warmly clasped by Biddle. "But," continued the young midshipman, "won't you tell us, Mr. Porter, how such a shameful state of affairs happens to exist, and why we are paying tribute to a lot of black pirates?"

"We are paying tribute, as you call it, because until now our navy has been too weak, and too busy with more important affairs, to attend to those who demand it. You see the carrying trade of the Mediterranean is so valuable that all maritime nations, including our own, are competing for it. At the same time the southern or African coast of those waters is held by the Barbary States, including Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. These are nothing more nor less than so many communities of pirates, legalized by, and tributary to, the Sultan of Turkey.

"All those people are good sailors, have strongly fortified harbors, and fairly powerful fleets. For centuries they have been the terrors of the Mediterranean, and the Barbary corsairs have at times ravaged the European coasts even to the British Isles, where they once sacked the Irish city of Baltimore. Each of the Christian nations has tried to buy from them immunity for its own vessels, and thus secure for itself the rich carrying trade of the pirate waters, by the payment of an annual tribute

to Bey, Dey, or Bashaw, and so we have been compelled to do the same thing. Thus the pirates finding the whole world cringing to them have naturally come to believe themselves the most powerful people of the earth, and act accordingly. So with each year they increase their exorbitant demands, and seek fresh excuses for breaking existing treaties.

“ Three years ago we sent to the Dey of Algiers a fine new frigate, that carried many valuable presents, including twenty-six barrels of dollars. Now each of the other Barbary States wants a frigate from us, and the Bashaw of Tripoli threatens war because we have just paid him but \$50,000, while we gave the Bey of Tunis \$40,000; and the Bashaw claims that, being twice as powerful as the Bey, he should receive twice as much money. At the same time our frigate *George Washington*, sent under Captain Bainbridge with our annual tribute to Algiers, has been compelled to sail in the service of the Dey ever since.

“ The pirates imagine us to be so weak that they may rob us with impunity, and thus far they have certainly been allowed to do so. Now, however, if I am not very much mistaken, our opportunity has arrived for teaching them a lesson; and I should not be surprised to see, within a few months, a squadron of American war-ships happily engaged in battering down the palace walls of Bey, Dey, Bashaw, and Emperor. So, young gentlemen, if you can only

restrain your fighting ardor for a short time, it may be expended with much more credit to yourselves than in pummelling each other.”

Thus saying, Lieutenant Porter left the steerage, while the two midshipmen regarded each other with smiling faces.

“Won’t it be a lark!” exclaimed Biddle.

“Won’t it just! and won’t we have to bear in mind that the eyes of our countrymen are —”

“Oh, rats!” cried the other. “Stow that rot, and undo your kit. I want to see if your outfit is any better than mine.”

CHAPTER VII

LEAVE OF ABSENCE FOR ONE MONTH

AT the end of a week the *Enterprise* again lay at anchor in the Delaware off the city front; and, during the short cruise just ended, Billy Vance had gained such a store of experience that all his previous knowledge of nautical affairs seemed insignificant when compared with it. He had even been on board the fine frigate, *Philadelphia*, and dined with the jovial "reefers" of its steerage mess, which, to his surprise, he had discovered to be a repository of all knowledge, past, present, and future. He had listened with wondering amazement to the discussion and prompt solution of the most intricate political and diplomatic questions of the day, had heard the construction, rig, and equipment of nearly every ship in the navy severely criticised, and had been grieved to learn that not a man in the service above the grade of midshipman was competent to fill the position in which he was placed. The greatest surprise of the entire evening, however, had been to discover that his own messmate of the *Enterprise*, Midshipman Biddle, was even better posted on all such questions than the entire steerage mess of the

Philadelphia; and, not only laid down the law, with emphasis on every point, but could out-talk all the others and silence them in argument.

After the dinner was over and the two young "Prizes" returned to their own ship in the dinghy, pulled by a single sailor, Billy ventured to ask his companion how he had managed to accumulate such a vast store of information.

"All the result of experience, my boy," answered the other, complacently. "There's no school like it. But didn't I do well with your great speech of the other night? Rather pleased those chaps, don't you think?"

"My speech!" gasped Billy; "was it supposed to be my speech you were getting off when the fellows at your end of the table roared so?"

"Of course; whose did you think it was?"

"I thought you were imitating the clown in a circus."

"It was something after the same style, that's a fact."

"You villain! I've a mind to thrash you for that."

"Oh, no, you won't. In the first place, you can't, and in the second, if you should lift a hand against your superior officer, meaning me, I could have you courtmartialled, and probably hanged. So you see, it wouldn't be wise even to try it on."

"Oh, you be hanged yourself," laughed Billy. "But really you'd better let my great speech, as

you call it, alone for the future if you don't want to get into trouble."

"All right," agreed the other. "I will till the next time. Look out. Here we are home again from a foreign ship, as the hymn says."

On the whole, Billy had so thoroughly enjoyed his first cruise, that he was not especially overjoyed to find an official document granting his application for a month's leave awaiting his arrival.

Noting his long face as he read it, Biddle kindly offered to take the leave in his place, including the visit to Bonny Eagle and the eating of its fatted calf, whereupon Billy shied a treatise on navigation at his brother officer's head, and began making preparations for the homeward journey.

It would be very pleasant, after all, to see the dear ones at Bonny Eagle once more, and to show off his uniform to them, to say nothing of his newly acquired strength. Wouldn't Martin be proud, and Emily, dear little Emily, how she would rejoice! Yes, of course he was glad to go. Besides, since it was winter and the roads were almost impassable, the trip as far as New York was to be made by sailing-packet. That meant another voyage, during which much further nautical experience might be gained; while the *Enterprise* might not even lift anchor again before his return.

So on the following morning he was set ashore, saw his chest safely on board the packet sloop *Polly*,

on which he was to sail at sharp noon, and went to bid farewell to his kind friend Dr. Dean. He found the latter in a very anxious frame of mind on account of the non-receipt of any news from Ruth, who had now been gone nearly five months. Several mail packets had arrived from across the Atlantic during that time, but none of them had brought word from her nor even any report of the vessel on which she had sailed.

"I can't understand it," fretted the Doctor, as he nervously paced the floor of his private office. "They started at a good season of the year. No severe gales were reported during the time their passage should have occupied, their ship was one of the stanchest, the war with France is to all intents and purposes ended, and so I cannot in any way account for the miscarriage of the letters that I am certain must have been written."

"It is sure to come out all right, sir," ventured Billy, not knowing what else to say. "At any rate, I will make it my first business to hunt the dear girl up and see that she does not come to harm, just as soon as I reach the other side."

"If I have not heard from her long before that time, I fear I shall be dead of anxiety," replied the Doctor, with a faint smile, and to this Billy knew not what to answer by way of consolation. Thus it was a relief to find his hour for sailing so nearly arrived that he must hasten away.

There were at that time a number of sailing-packets, mostly small sloops or schooners, plying between Philadelphia and New York, and it was on a bluff-bowed, stoutly built vessel of the former rig that our young midshipman's passage had been engaged. Being a sociable chap, he was somewhat disappointed to find himself the only passenger on board the *Polly*, though that was not surprising, considering the inclemency of the season and the timidity of the average traveller of those days.

Nor was Billy particularly pleased to learn that the sloop was to be in charge of her mate, the captain having been laid off for this trip by an accident, and a green hand having been shipped at the last moment to make up the full complement of the crew. This consisted of two white men, and a negro cook who rejoiced in the name of Adolphus Cicero Ham, but answered to the hail of "Dolphus."

As the clumsy sloop dropped slowly down past the *Enterprise*, Billy's heart was warmed by a sight of his friend Biddle waving him a farewell.

"Good-bye, old man. Give my love to the folks at home," shouted the latter. "I'm booked to repeat your great speech at a dinner to-morrow. Wish you could be there."

"Good-bye. Don't you dare do it, or you'll be sorry next time we meet."

"I'll risk it," laughed the other. "My compliments to the fatted calf, and—" Here the voice was lost in the widening distance.

The *Polly* made a slow run down the river and was two days in reaching the capes. During this time the weather was mild and hazy, with winds light and baffling from the southward. As they finally rounded Cape May and stood out to sea, night was falling. There was an uncanny moaning in the air, and the weather looked so threatening even to Billy's inexperienced eyes that he ventured to ask the master if he didn't think it would be wiser to run back and lie under shelter of the land until morning.

At this the man, who was of surly disposition, laughed coarsely and declared that he was well able to sail the sloop without advice from any one, much less a mere passenger. Thus snubbed, Billy went below, where he found Dolphus preparing supper.

"Looks like it gwine be a dirty night, Marse Vance," was the cook's greeting.

"That's what I just said to the captain, but he seems to think not."

"Laws, Marse Vance. You done ruin us shuah, for dat man jes' go by contraries. Ef you'd a said, 'Fine night, sah, an we'm boun' ter make er quick run up de coas'; he'd anchored onder de cape quicker'n wink, jes' to show how he knowed better'n you. Now he'll stan' out ter sea an' carry on long's he's got er patch of canvas lef'. Yes, suh, I'se feared we'se in fer serious times. So I ervise you ter eat er big suppah, sence dar's no saying when you git anudder."

Profiting by this advice, Billy ate a hearty supper

and then returned to the deck. Short as had been his absence from it, a decided change in the weather had taken place during the interval. The night was intensely dark, the air held a bitter chill, and angry gusts of wind from off shore were sweeping across the black waters. As no one spoke to him, and he was evidently not wanted on deck, our lad speedily sought the cabin's warmth and soon afterwards turned in.

A few hours later he was rudely awakened from a sound sleep, by being flung from his bunk to the floor. As he gained his senses, it seemed to him that the sloop must be on her beam ends, so sharp was the inclination at which she was heeled, and filled with apprehension he hastily gained the deck. Here he found the little packet struggling with a gale, that to his inexperience seemed to blow with the force of a hurricane. Only the peak of her mainsail was showing, and the white men of her crew were forward, striving to get in the jib, while Dolphus steadied the wheel. Not a light was visible from any part of the laboring vessel, and only the foaming crests of savagely breaking seas relieved the absolute blackness of the night.

Suddenly there came a terrible cry from forward. A huge shape reared itself out of the gloom and seemed to leap straight at the trembling sloop. Then came a crash followed by an awful grinding. The sloop heeled over until it seemed as though she must be forced under, and then righted, while the ship that

had torn away her bowsprit, at the same time snapping her mast short off close to the deck, swept by and was swallowed by the night.

Billy had been flung to the deck by the first shock of collision, nearly drowned by the inrush of water that followed, and was only saved from being swept overboard by instinctively clutching at a rope that came in his way.

After the first great danger was past, he shouted for Dolphus, and the sound of the honest fellow's voice in reply was like a ray of sunlight piercing the gloom of a dungeon. Then he made his way cautiously forward, where he was confronted by a bewildering maze of wreckage. Here he also shouted again and again, but could win no answer. Nor could he discover a sign of human presence, and was finally forced to the melancholy conclusion that he and the negro were sole survivors of the disaster that had so swiftly overtaken their vessel.

CHAPTER VIII

STORM, WRECK, AND DISASTER

THE slow dragging hours of that night seemed an eternity to the helpless occupants of the wreck, and never was daylight more ardently longed for. Wallowing helplessly in the trough of the sea, the sloop rolled so frightfully that it was well-nigh impossible to retain a position on her deck. Every now and then a great wave would break completely over her, while the wreckage that had gone by the board, but was still held by a tangle of rigging, thumped the sides of the laboring vessel until it seemed that they must surely be crushed in.

When the first gray of dawn began to reveal dim outlines of crested billows and tossing wreckage, the two survivors were so numbed by cold and wet as to be almost incapable of motion, and it was only by a violent effort that Billy Vance threw off the stupor into which he had fallen.

“Come, Dolphus,” he cried, “daylight is here at last, and whatever we are going to do to save ourselves must be done quickly.”

With this he crawled to his companion’s side and began shaking him. The exercise was so good for

both of them that, within a few minutes, they had gained their feet and were taking in the melancholy details of their position. The gale not only showed no signs of abating, but seemed to be gaining in strength with each minute, while the air was filled with flying spray that struck their faces with stinging force. But worst of all was, the wreckage still held alongside and battered their vessel with cruel blows.

"We must clear that away first thing," shouted Billy. "Come on, for there isn't a moment to lose."

So the lad, with his midshipman's dirk, which he then used for the first time, and Dolphus, with the sheath-knife worn by every sailor, began to hack furiously at the tangle of rigging. After a half-hour of this work they had the satisfaction of severing the last connecting stay between the floating spars and the sloop. As the former still refused to part company with the vessel, Billy crept cautiously aft and put the wheel hard over. Then the sloop's head slowly payed off until she was dead before the wind, and began to forge heavily ahead, leaving behind one of the enemies that had threatened her existence. But there was another that they could not leave, and which, fight as they might, would surely claim the doomed packet in the end. This was water, and it was discovered by Dolphus when he went below in search of something to eat as well as with a faint hope of being able to make a pot of

coffee. Quickly reappearing on deck, his face ashen with fear, he cried:—

“We’se a sinkin’, Marse Vance! We’se sinkin’ shuah, fo’ de water’s already ober de cabin flo’.”

“Very well,” replied Billy, calmly; “go to work and pump it out.”

“Pump, Marse Vance! You expec’ pumpin’ do any good?”

“Certainly I do, and you want to jump at it in a hurry. When you are exhausted, I will take your place.”

So the terrible, heart-breaking labor of pumping was begun, and from that moment it was continued with but short intervals for two days and nights, during which time the gale continued to rage with unabated fury, ever sweeping their poor little craft farther and farther out into the broad Atlantic.

During this unequal struggle for existence, they had little to eat, and less to drink, since a quantity of salt water had found its way into the scuttle butt, rendering its contents nearly unfit for use. They managed to keep their vessel before the wind, and also to prevent the water in the hold from gaining; but they could not reduce it by a single inch. Although with every moment of daylight they strained their eyes toward the horizon, no glimpse of a sail rewarded their longing gaze. In all their distress their sole comfort was that they had been driven across the Gulf Stream and no longer suffered from

the cold that had numbed them during the first awful night.

But even warmth could not restore their wasting strength, nor compensate for the exhaustion of their ceaseless labor, and at length they could endure no more. The negro was the first to give out: and, in the early evening of the second day he flung himself to the deck, declaring that he would rather die at once than pump another stroke. So Billy took his place and worked for an hour longer, though his whole body was racked with sharp pains, his legs almost refused to support him, his arms had lost all sense of feeling and his eyes were so heavy with sleep that he could not keep them open.

At length he, too, gave out. His nerveless grasp slipped from the pump brake, he staggered blindly, fell to the deck, and was instantly fast asleep. About this same time the gale showed signs of abating, the wind began to subside, and the sea to go down, until the water-logged packet finally ceased to make forward progress, and was only swung from one long swell to another as though rocked in a gigantic cradle. But ever as she rose and fell with the movement of the sea, the water within her crept higher and higher, lapping to and fro with gurgles of delight at finding its prey at length so surely within its power.

So the two helpless ones slept on through the night until the sun rose again and found them still sleeping. By this time the creeping waters had so nearly gained

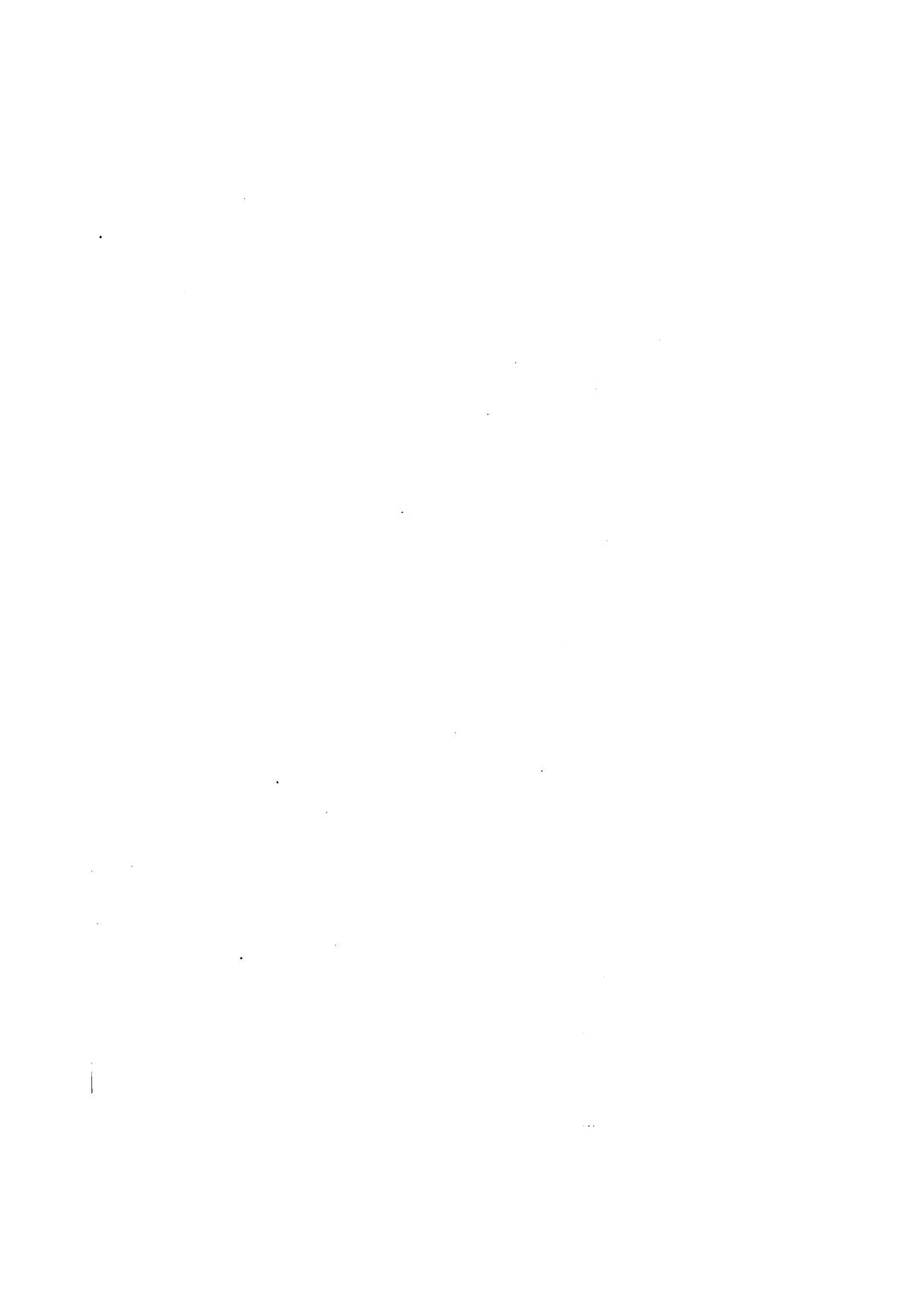
the deck that the packet looked like a raft barely showing above the surface, and had evidently but a few minutes more to float.

All at once a strange thing happened. Billy Vance was dreaming of the jovial steerage of the *Philadelphia* and hearing once more the rollicking songs in which he had so recently joined; when, clear and distinct above all the tumult, came the voice of Ruth Dean, imploring him to save her. In an instant the lad was awake and gazing wildly about him. Ruth's voice still rang in his ears, and her cry for help seemed to echo in the morning air. It was all so real that he fully expected to see the dear girl close at hand and was bewildered at her non-appearance. What he did see was a swarm of rats racing back and forth across the deck, as though seeking to escape some imminent danger. Even as he looked, several of the creatures ran over his prostrate body, and to avoid them he scrambled to his feet.

As Billy did this, a shout from behind caused him to spin around as though he had been shot. For a moment he stared speechless with amazement at the most beautiful brig he had ever seen. She was less than a pistol shot away, and slipping easily along under a press of canvas. Her deck was crowded with men, all gazing toward the wreck, and by her row of ports he knew her to be intended for the trade of fighting. A great hope surged within our lad's breast. She might be an American man-of-war; and he began



THE BRIG'S PEOPLE HAD SEEN HIM, AND WERE COMING TO
HIS RESCUE.



to shout incoherently. That is, he thought he shouted; while from his parched throat came only a husky murmur. But the brig's people had seen him, and were coming to his rescue, as was shown by the graceful craft luffing sharply into the wind, throwing her sails aback, and lying to, while one of her quarter boats was lowered with the evident intention of pulling to the wreck.

In the mean time, Dolphus, also roused from his sleep of exhaustion, now stood by Billy's side, uttering uncouth expressions of thankfulness. All at once he grasped his companion's arm, exclaiming:—

“Come quick, Marse Vance. We gotter swim fer it. Dis yer ship sinkin' onder our feet. See dem ratses? Dey knows. An' I feelin' her tremble like she scairt. Hit a shuah sign dat less'n one minute sh'e be gone. So we gotter jump an' swim, or else be sucked under. Come on.”

With this the negro leaped from the rail and struck out toward the brig, while Billy, with a look of despair on his face, stood where he had been left.

Glancing back, Dolphus saw him thus and again shouted for him to come on.

“I can't swim,” cried the lad.

As the negro comprehended these significant words, he whirled about, regained the doomed sloop with a couple of powerful strokes, and said quietly:—

“Den yo' mus slip inter de water, put yo' han's on

my shoulders, an' trus' de good Lawd to gib' me strength fer bofe. Quick, boy, or yo' is los'!"

Thus adjured, Billy no longer hesitated, but dropped over the side, and in another moment the negro was making desperate efforts to carry them both to a place of safety. Ere he had taken a dozen strokes there came a loud cry from the brig. Then Billy found himself beneath the water, and being dragged down as though by the clutch of unseen fingers. Finally, when his brain seemed about to burst, they relaxed their hold and he began to rise.

Dolphus having first torn loose from the pull of the sinking sloop, was waiting for him, and seized his collar the moment he appeared. Directly afterwards the brig's boat reached them, and five minutes later both the rescued men stood in safety on board the French privateer *l'Agile*, homeward bound from Guadeloupe.

This brig had destroyed an immense amount of American and British shipping in the West Indies before being in turn captured by the American schooner of war *Enterprise*, and sent into St. Kitt's, where she was sold. Having been purchased in French interests, she was again fitted out as a privateer and sent home to cruise against British commerce in the Mediterranean. It was while thus homeward bound, carrying a number of passengers, among which were women, children, and several invalided officers, that she fell in with the sinking

packet, which, but for her opportune arrival, would have carried our hero to the bottom of the sea.

No sooner did Billy set foot on *l'Agile*'s deck, than he was surrounded by a clamorous group, all asking questions, not one word of which could he understand. Finally, one of the invalided officers, a French general, who could speak a little English, addressed him in that language, and asked for an account of himself.

"I am an officer in the United States navy, attached to the schooner of war *Enterprise*," began Billy; but at this point he was interrupted by a series of most violent demonstrations on the part of the brig's captain, who danced around him in an ecstasy of rage, shaking a fist in his face, applying to him the most abusive epithets, and declaring that he should be hanged on the spot.

As the captain gave orders to have this threat immediately put into execution, poor Billy was seized, bound, and dragged forward to where a whip having a noose in one end was being rove to a yard-arm. Then for the first time a knowledge of the fate intended for him flashed into the lad's mind.

CHAPTER IX

BILLY JOINS A PRIVATEER

It is almost incredible that any man could consign to so cruel a fate a fellow-being who had never harmed him and whom he had just rescued from a certain death; but the captain of the privateer *l'Agile* was fully capable of just such an act. In his trade of legalized piracy he had become accustomed to gratify every passion, to place a slight value on human life, and to commit murder with impunity. Having been severely wounded in his fight with the *Enterprise* when that schooner captured his vessel and broke up his successful career of robbery, he entertained feelings of the utmost bitterness toward all Americans, while the mere mention of the word "Enterprise" was sufficient to throw him into a frenzy of rage. As his wound had been in the head, it is probable that his brain was affected, so that he was not now wholly responsible for his actions. He was, however, still in command of his ship, where his word was law; and, when, in a fury at discovering a self-avowed officer of the hated American schooner within his power, he ordered him to be hanged, no one of his crew thought of disputing him or failing to obey his behest.

There was one man aboard *l'Agile*, however, who did not recognize French authority, and who, as he beheld the treatment accorded to his helpless comrade, was filled with as fierce a rage as was the captain himself. Weak with exhaustion as Dolphus had been but a moment before, he sprang forward with all the strength of a wounded tiger, at sight of a noose placed about Billy Vance's neck. The two men holding the prisoner were felled to the deck by single blows from the negro's powerful fist, while the others surrounding him were scattered like chaff. The noose was flung off, the lad's bonds were severed, and then with brandished knife the intrepid black faced the whole ship's company, daring them to come within his reach.

With the first surprise of his onset the French sailors had fallen back, leaving a clear space of deck about the two Americans. Now no one seemed inclined to venture within its limits, but there was a rush for muskets, the first of which was levelled by the half-crazed captain. Ere he could fire, it was dashed aside by the brave old French general, who, calling upon his fellow-officers for support, placed them in front of the Americans and began to denounce the action of the brig's captain with a bitter fluency.

Although Billy could not understand what was said, he realized by the downcast looks of the crew, and the furtive glances cast right and left by the captain, as though in search of some escape from the general's scathing words, that an intervention

was being made in his behalf. Finally the captain uttered a few disjointed sentences, threw down the musket, which he had retained until that moment, walked sullenly aft, and disappeared within his own cabin.

Upon this the general turned with a polite bow to the young American, and said: "Monsieur, you will not hang, but will be treat as one prisoner of war. So you will be what you call 'lockup,' but have no fear, for soon I will come to you. If you will inform your man, so that he make not the demonstration, I shall be happy."

Comprehending that he was, for the present at least, saved from the fate that had so recently threatened, Billy passed the word to Dolphus that all was well, gave the brave fellow's hand a grateful squeeze, and consented to be led below. At the same time the black, followed by glances of mingled hatred and fear, made his way unmolested to the brig's galley, where he found several persons of his own color.

As a prisoner of war, our young midshipman was thrown into the one vacant space provided with a door that could be locked, in all that crowded ship. It was the paint room, and when closed was unprovided with any aperture for light or ventilation save a narrow grating above the door. The place swarmed with rats and roaches, was absolutely dark, and was so stifling with the odors of paints, varnishes, and oils, that our poor lad began to think he had twice es-

caped death that morning only to meet it here in a third form more dreadful than either of the others. He had begged for water from the sailors who brought him to that awful place ; but they either failed to understand him or were indifferent to his distress, and so left him without satisfying his needs.

After their retreating footsteps had died away, Billy stood for awhile pressed as close to the door as possible, listening for the promised coming of the brave old man who had already stood between him and death. For what seemed hours of suffering he waited ; then in a fury of despair, and believing himself deserted of all men, he began to dash against the door, hoping thus to break it down, and careless of the bruises he was inflicting upon his own body. But he could make no impression on its stout planking, and at length sank to the floor exhausted by his efforts. Here, however, the air was so foul that he quickly regained his feet and, groping in the darkness, found a keg on which to stand, with his head lifted to a level of the narrow aperture above the door. At this point the air was at least breathable, and here he could watch for the first gleam of light that should herald an approaching visitor.

Finally it came, and the poor lad was thrilled with joy at sight of its flickering rays. Voices and footsteps followed ; then his prison door was unlocked and thrown open. The visitor was, as he had hoped, his friend, the general, bearing a lantern, and ac-

accompanied by a black boy, who brought a jug of water and a loaf of bread.

With a choking expression of thankfulness Billy fell ravenously upon these things, first drinking and then eating. The black boy having been dismissed, the general now watched the famished lad in pitying silence. When after awhile the latter attempted to thank the old man for his great kindness, the Frenchman quickly checked him, saying:—

“What I do is nothing. Twice have I been prisoner of war to the *Enterprise*. One time even I was held to hang if my countrymen should hang the Americans in Basse Terre; but always I was treated like a gentleman; for the Americans, therefore, while I have little of love, I have much of gratitude, and now I repay a little the kindness shown to me.”

“Have you, then, met Shaw, Sterrett, Decatur, and Porter?” inquired Billy, eagerly.

“Certainly, I knew well all those men. They are *mes amis*—what you call my friends.”

“And mine!” cried Billy.

“Then have we also the friendship,” rejoined the general, with a courtly bow, “and for you I will do what I can.”

“Can’t you take me out of this dreadful place, sir, and let me go on deck? It seems as though I should die down here.”

“But it is more safe,” replied the other. “If you now go on deck, the captain will kill you, for in the

day he is as the Dev. In the night he remains in his bed and drinks cognac. Then may you go on the deck, and he will not know. But I will make open this door, and the flambeau I will leave here so you may have breath and also see the rat. Now, *au revoir*, for I must go. In the night will I come again."

With this arrangement Billy was forced to be content, and by it his condition was decidedly bettered. In spite of his unpleasant surroundings he managed to pass the greater part of the day in sleep, and at midnight his kind friend again appeared with a further supply of food. After he had eaten this the lad was cautiously led on deck for an hour or two of fresh air.

Never had this most common of all earthly blessings seemed so grateful to him than after his long confinement in that unventilated hold, and never had he seen a night so glorious. The stars shone with unusual brilliancy as though burnished by the recent storm and newly reset in the arching vault of the heavens. The sea was rippled by a fresh breeze before which the brig was slipping pleasantly along under all plain sail. A snow-crested wave curled away from either bow, and a broad path of phosphorescence glistened in her eddying wake. Save for the sibilant murmur of parted waters and the hum-ming of the night winds through the web of taut rigging, the brig moved in stately silence, and her deck

was deserted except by a motionless form at the wheel, a few sleepers stretched under the weather bulwark, and the slow-pacing figure of a watch on the forecastle.

Fearful of attracting attention if he should remain in company with the prisoner, the general, having first gained a promise from Billy to regain his place of confinement before daylight, bade him good night and retired to the cabin.

After this, for several days and nights the programme of the first twenty-four hours was repeated almost without variation. The half-crazed captain of the brig, who drank himself into insensibility with each night only to become a terror to every soul on board with the advent of day, ignored the prisoner's existence as completely as though he had forgotten him. The example thus set was followed by the entire ship's company, except that the general paid the lad an occasional brief visit whenever he could do so undetected, the black boy carried him food and water whenever he happened to remember this duty, and once Billy succeeded in holding a short interview with Dolphus in the galley, where the latter was kept constantly at work under guards. As neither of the prisoners had been able to discover whither they were being taken, or what fate was in store for them, they could not plan any future action; but each promised to stand by the other in any emergency and to make an attempt to escape at the first opportunity.

One morning the captain of *l'Agile* failed to appear on deck at his usual hour, and as no one dared disturb him save in a pressing emergency, the daily routine of the brig was allowed to proceed without him. At length as the hour of noon approached, the first officer ventured to visit his superior's room with the information that it was time to take an observation. Receiving no answer to his repeated knocks, this man finally called assistance and forced the door. The captain lay in his bunk apparently asleep ; but the confined air of the room was filled with the fumes of brandy that had at last accomplished its fatal work. The wretched man had passed from a drunkard's sleep to a drunkard's death, alone and unmourned.

Sailors are naturally averse to having a corpse remain on shipboard longer than is necessary. So, in the present case it was no sooner certain that the captain was not only dead, but had been so for hours, than preparations were made to bury him. Thus, within an hour after the body was discovered, it was committed to the sea, and the command of the brig devolved upon him who had served as her first lieutenant.

Now it happened that this man had been selected for his fighting qualities rather than his seamanship ; and, while he was a good sailor, he had no knowledge of navigation, other than by dead reckoning. Although this method is crude and liable to inaccuracies, it might have served to carry the brig into the

Mediterranean, had this been all that was wanted; but it was not. Owing to the large number of passengers on board, the supply of water was running low, and could not possibly be made to last until the end of the voyage. Therefore it had been decided that *l'Agile* should touch at the Azores to refill her barrels; but how to find so small a spot on the broad Atlantic was entirely beyond the new commander's knowledge. In this dilemma he turned to the chief among his passengers for advice; and the moment the general comprehended the situation he replied:—

“ Your prisoner, the young American officer. Doubtless he is a navigator. Will you that I shall ask him ? ”

CHAPTER X

BECOMES CHIEF NAVIGATOR OF THE BRIG

THE proposition made by the general was so amazing that for a moment Lieutenant Vigo could hardly believe he had heard aright. Not having seen the prisoner since his first appearance on board, he only remembered him as a mere boy, to whom he should never think of intrusting a matter of navigation. Then, too, the lad was an enemy, and as such must always be regarded with suspicion. Certainly he would prefer to navigate the brig by dead reckoning, and trust to luck, than to take the risk suggested.

But the general thought differently. He was already suffering inconvenience from a short allowance of fresh water, and was not willing to relinquish any chance, however slight, of refilling at the Azores. So, partly by persuasion, and partly by threats, he finally so far overcame the lieutenant's opposition to his plan, that the latter consented to visit the prisoner and question him.

Thus it happened that while Billy Vance, with no knowledge of the important incident of that morning, was sitting in the darkness, to which he had now become accustomed, engaged in making fruitless

attacks with a stick against the rats that swarmed about him, he was surprised by a visit from the general and a stranger whom he did not remember to have seen before.

“How do you carry yourself to-day, my friend?” began the former.

“Very uncomfortably, thank you, sir,” replied Billy, blinking in the lantern light.

“But you are a sailor and accustomed to ships?”

“Yes, I am a sailor; but my experience with ships has been on deck, not in rat-holes.”

“Then you are perhaps familiar with navigation, and understand the use of such instruments as would enable you to locate the position of a ship in any part of the ocean?”

“Certainly I understand navigation,” replied Billy, wondering at the question.

“Could you direct the course of this brig to the Western Isles with precision?”

“If provided with a good chart and instruments of precision, I could undoubtedly do so.”

“It is as I thought!” exclaimed the general, who then held an earnest conversation with his companion, during which Billy wondered what was up.

Finally, turning again to our lad, the general said: “I will now explain why I have questioned you. It is because of the death of our captain.”

“The captain of this brig?” queried Billy.

“It is the same. He is dead, and this gentleman,

Lieutenant Vigo, is his successor in office. As, with the loss of the captain, navigators have become scarce in the ship, he comes with me to ask if you are willing, in exchange for removal to better quarters, to take a daily observation of the sun, and report to him your finding of the ship's position, that his reckoning may thereby be verified?"

The young midshipman was at a loss how to answer this proposition; for, believing the United States and France to be still at war, would he not be giving aid and comfort to an enemy should he assist in navigating a French vessel? At the same time his life had been saved by that vessel, and it was as important for him as for any one else that she should reach port in safety. Noting his hesitation, the general continued:—

"It is of great concern that our reckoning be exact, as the ship is nearly empty of water, and a new supply may only be obtained at the Western Isles, which you will call the Azores. Therefore we must not pass them, or we may perish. Already is there much of suffering among the women and little children."

"In that case I will consent to assist in the navigation," said Billy, with all his scruples gone to the winds.

"You will give your parole as a gentleman officer to make observation each day, and record truly its result?"

"I will."

"Also your parole that you will not seek to escape from this ship before she reaches a port of France?"

"No, sir. I will make no such promise."

When this last question and its prompt answer in the negative was made known to Lieutenant Vigo, he was at first very angry, but after a little he smiled and said it would make no difference.

Thus it was settled, and Billy, bidding farewell to his rat-hole without regret, was conducted to the deck. There, for the first time in a week, he found himself in a blaze of sunlight that smote his eyeballs with the pain of a blow. Clapping his hands over his face to exclude the glare, he allowed himself to be led blindly aft. When next he was able to note his surroundings he was in the brig's cabin, where were collected a number of passengers, who stared at him curiously. Now for the first time he realized what a forlorn and utterly disreputable appearance he must present. He was bareheaded and barefooted, black with the grime and filth of his recent prison; his hair was long and matted, while his once cherished uniform was ragged, faded, and shrunken out of all proportion by the repeated soakings and dryings to which it had been subjected. In this sorry plight he was much relieved to escape the amused gaze of the passengers by taking refuge in the captain's stateroom, which he was told he might occupy for the present.

As Billy was happily ignorant of the terrible sight presented in that same room but a few hours earlier,

he only contrasted it with his late quarters in the hold, and regarded its manifold comforts with great satisfaction. Lieutenant Vigo had already examined the captain's effects, and removed to his own room the things that he deemed of greatest value. Still much had been left, including nautical instruments, charts, and an abundance of clothing. From the latter Billy was told to take whatever he might need to make himself presentable, and then he was left in sole possession of the room.

"This is the most literal stepping into a dead man's shoes that I ever heard of," reflected our young "reefer," as he tried on a pair of pumps that proved to be a most comfortable fit. "And what a queer go this whole affair is. A few minutes ago I was the forlornest and most miserable being on board, while now I am the ship's navigator, occupying the captain's room, and at liberty to make such use as I please of his belongings, all of which goes to show that one man's ill wind is another's fair breeze. Hope I shall be able to do something with these instruments and tables, but they do look hopelessly Frenchy."

Billy had paused, half-dressed, to study the problem thus presented, and was still puzzling over the vernier of a quadrant, when the general reappeared to announce that as the sun was still sufficiently high for an observation, his presence was desired on deck.

So the lad hastened his dressing, and when, a few

minutes later, he emerged from the room clad in a suit of snowy duck, patent leather pumps, and a French naval cap, and carrying a quadrant in his hand, his appearance was greeted with a murmur of approval from the assembled passengers. The general had informed them that this young officer of the United States navy had volunteered to assist in navigating their vessel to the nearest port in which a supply of water could be procured, and it was even whispered among them that their ultimate safety would be largely dependent upon his efforts. Therefore they regarded him with intense interest, and followed in a body to the deck to see what he would do.

As our young navigator assumed a position for taking his observation, he found himself facing a situation quite as embarrassing as when he had been called upon to make a speech to the officers assembled about Dr. Dean's table. It was rendered doubly trying by the knowledge that nearly every one of those now surrounding him was an enemy, who regarded him with hostile eyes, and would have rejoiced at his discomfiture. To be sure, the general, who stood beside him holding a chronometer, was to a certain degree friendly; while black Dolphus, who, from the waist of the brig, regarded him with open-mouthed amazement, was undoubtedly so. Lieutenant Vigo, also on hand, and provided with a quadrant with which he proposed to go through the form of taking an observation, was feeling bitterly

the humiliation of his position, and failed to conceal the fact that his attitude toward the young American was one of jealous hatred.

Yet it was he who gave Billy the courage necessary to act his part; for glancing at his rival, it suddenly flashed into our lad's mind that the lieutenant was lacking in a knowledge of seamanship essential to his position, and that he was the only navigator on board the brig. The man's very attitude, his nervousness, the awkward manner in which he handled his instrument, and his evident imitation of Billy's every movement, were proofs of his ignorance that filled our young sailor with a renewed confidence in his own powers. How thankful he was at that minute for having studied when the opportunity offered, and how fully he realized that, under all circumstances, knowledge and power are synonymous terms. At the same time he was so overwhelmed with a sense of his present responsibility that he grew pale, and his hands trembled as, at the general's call of "Time," he raised the quadrant to his eyes for a squint at the sun.

It was a tedious task, even with the general's assistance, to calculate in French terms and with French tables from the meridian of Paris instead of Greenwich. Long before the desired result was obtained, the young navigator expected to have the lieutenant interrupt his labors, and question him as to their length. When a conclusion was finally

reached, and the brig's position platted on a chart, Billy was still doubtful as to its accuracy, but did not betray his misgivings even to the general, who took it upon himself to announce the result to Lieutenant Vigo.

In a few minutes he returned to say that this result agreed so nearly with that obtained by the lieutenant, that for all practical purposes they were identical.

Then Billy knew for a certainty that the commander of the brig was, as he had suspected, entirely ignorant of navigation, and that thenceforth he alone of all the ship's company could direct her course across the trackless ocean. He knew this because, in reviewing his figures during the general's absence, he had discovered an error that altered the vessel's position by more than a degree of longitude; but this fact he carefully concealed within his own bosom.

CHAPTER XI

ACCURATE FIGURING OR CERTAIN DEATH

As Billy Vance became conscious of the great fact that he was master of the situation, and could direct the course of *l'Agile* where he pleased, he was filled with exultation, and immediately began to plan how he should use his newly acquired power. He knew he could not head the brig back toward the United States, for such a complete reversal of her course would quickly be detected. He might, however, carry her to the northward, and make her daily run appear so much less than it really was as to place her somewhere off the Spanish coast, on the cruising ground of American privateers and British men-of-war while she was apparently still in the vicinity of the Azores. Then, if she should happen to be captured by an American, it was just possible that he might be allowed the glory of carrying the prize home, and our lad's heart swelled with pride at the mere thought of such a thing.

Even if she should be taken by a British cruiser, he would certainly be permitted to await at Gibraltar the coming of Commodore Dale's squadron. At that common meeting-point of the world's commerce, he

could pick up much information concerning the movements of Barbary corsairs that would be of value to his countrymen. After transmitting his news to the flagship, what fun it would be to pull alongside the *Enterprise* and paralyze Midshipman Biddle by reporting for duty as though he had only been absent a few hours. Billy laughed aloud with the mere contemplation of his messmate's amazement at his appearance and envy of his adventures.

"Either of those things might happen," reflected the lad, "and I can surely accomplish one or the other if I only make the most of my present opportunity. I wonder if any other fellow ever had such a chance so early in his career?"

All at once two very unpleasant thoughts intruded themselves into his meditations. One was a recollection of the parole by which he was in honor bound to make a truthful record of his daily observations. The other was induced by the wail of a child outside his stateroom door. Could he, to serve his own ends, allow that little one to suffer and perhaps die, for want of water? In an instant all the young fellow's dreams of what might be were dispelled, and he knew that both honor and duty demanded the fulfilment of his promise. Accordingly he informed the general of the mistake he had discovered, and sent word to Lieutenant Vigo that in order to head for the Azores he must alter the brig's course by half a point.

It very soon became evident to the ship's company that Billy Vance was the sole navigator on board and that he held their fate in his hands. He was therefore treated with marked respect by all except Lieutenant Vigo, who seemed to entertain for the young American as great a dislike as was formerly held by the dead captain. He never noticed the lad if he could help it and avoided meeting him as much as possible.

In the mean time every soul on board was put on the shortest possible allowance of water, in spite of which their supply of the precious fluid diminished with startling rapidity. At length the pitiful daily allowance was doled out by the spoonful, and they entered upon a period of great suffering. The weather had turned very warm, and men lay about the deck, gasping under the pitiless blue sky, watching and praying for rain clouds that never came. In the cabin the wail of children crying for water was incessant, and several times Billy gave his own wretched allowance to some perishing little one.

Crazed by their sufferings, many of the ship's company cursed him for not bringing them more speedily to land. Some even declared that he was carrying them in the wrong direction, with a view to seizing the brig himself when an opportunity offered. These in their madness would have killed him, had they not been restrained by the general and those whom he could influence. Whenever Billy took an observa-

tion, his every movement was watched by scores of bloodshot eyes, as though their owners expected to detect him in some act of treachery.

The winds were light and baffling; still, with each day Billy was able to announce that they were drawing nearer to the longed-for islands. Finally came the joyful tidings that, in a few hours more, if his calculations were correct, land ought to be discovered. After that no one would go below, but all remained on deck, straining their eyes for the blessed sight. The strongest swarmed in the rigging, and eager watchers were stationed in the tops. It was a bitter disappointment when darkness fell without anything having been discovered, and fierce were the threats of what would happen to the young navigator in case another dawn should fail to make good his prediction. Some of these threats Billy understood, especially that of Lieutenant Vigo, who swore with a great oath that, if sunrise did not show them the promised islands, it should witness the hanging of the traitor who had misled them; and to this there was no dissenting voice.

“So if their old chronometer has varied by a minute, or if there is a mistake of a single figure in their confounded tables, I am to pay for the error with my life,” thought Billy, bitterly. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that our lad, in company with many others, kept the deck without thought of sleep during the long watches of that critical night.

At length the weary hours of darkness were ended, a promise of day appeared in the east, and the rigging again swarmed with men darkly silhouetted against the reddening sky. A great silence, only broken by an occasional cry of a child, pervaded the vessel as, under towering canvas, she slipped smoothly through the gray waters. As the light strengthened and a wider circle of vision opened with each second, murmurs of anger began to arise from all quarters; the lieutenant gave a low-voiced order, and in another minute the same deadly noose that had threatened Billy Vance on the day of his boarding the brig dangled ominously from the fore yardarm.

A streak of flame appeared on the eastern horizon. The sun was rising, and no land was discernible. A distant bank of cloud hung low off the starboard quarter, but the few who noticed it gave it scant heed, for all hopes were centred on what might be ahead.

As the glorious orb of day swung clear of the water, Lieutenant Vigo issued a sharp command that caused all eyes to turn in his direction. Instantly a dozen armed men sprang to obey him, and advanced, with obvious intent, toward the place where Billy was standing. This time there seemed no hope that he could be saved. Neither the general nor Dolphus would be permitted to interfere; while all the others appeared either indifferent to his fate or eager for his death.

Instinctively the poor lad swept the entire horizon

with despairing gaze, and as his eyes rested on a point almost in the course the brig had traversed, he uttered a great cry, at the same time pointing with trembling finger.

Instantly every face was turned in that direction. There was a moment of stupefied silence. Then a mighty shout mingled with sobs and incoherent exclamations rose from deck and rigging. The cloud bank that lay behind them was slowly melting under the hot rays of the rising sun, and beneath it lay the islands they sought, but had passed in the night.

Even as they gazed and before the brig could be put about, Corvo and Flores were revealed, Fayal lifted its green head three thousand feet in air, Graciosa showed nearer at hand, and then they saw rugged Pico towering more than seven thousand feet above the sea, and proudly dominating its humbler neighbors.

With the marvellous sight there came a sudden revulsion of feeling in the minds of the ship's company toward the young navigator who had brought them safely across the trackless ocean to this goal of their hopes and desires. A moment before they had been ready to kill him. Now, overwhelmed with contrition for their hasty judgment, they thronged about him with abject apologies and eager gratitude. Some even sought to embrace him, but he would have nothing to do with them. Worn with watching and suspense, disgusted with the fickleness of his

shipmates, and desirous of a season of rest in which to prepare for the escape on which he was now more than ever determined, the lad broke loose from those who surrounded him, and hurrying below, threw himself wearily into his bunk.

Billy did not mean to sleep; but merely to rest until the brig should enter some harbor, when he proposed to return to the deck and study his surroundings, with a view to planning his future movements. So he lay awake, listening to such voices and sounds as reached him. These gradually grew fainter, until after a little they ceased altogether, and Billy Vance was buried in a slumber so profound that, when *l'Agile* finally dropped anchor in the harbor of Horta, the picturesque seaport of Fayal, he did not waken. Nor was his sleep disturbed when, at the end of another hour his friend, the general, entered the room with a jug of delicious water drawn from the first barrelful brought off to the brig. The old Frenchman hesitated a moment on seeing the lad's condition. Then he set down the jug and departed softly, closing the door behind him.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Vigo came, looked in, smiled grimly at the sleeping form, and also departed, only he locked the door after him and thrust its key into his pocket.

In the mean time all the passengers had gone ashore at the earliest opportunity, not only to seek refreshment, but to spend a delightful day in again treading

terra firma, after their long confinement on ship-board. After the water casks were filled, two-thirds of the crew were also granted shore leave; and, as the brig was to remain at anchor all night, no one would be obliged to return to her until morning, if it pleased him to remain in the town until then.

Black Dolphus had been made to help fill the casks, and was then told that he might remain on shore permanently, as in the future there would be no place for him on board the privateer. He was also threatened with being shot, in case he should attempt to return to her.

While all these things were happening, Billy Vance slept in blissful ignorance of them, nor did he once unclose his eyes until sometime after nightfall. Then he wakened with a great start, to find himself listening in confused dismay to the sounds of what seemed a furious struggle taking place just outside his state-room door.

CHAPTER XII

BLACK DOLPHUS JOINS A CONSPIRACY

DOLPHUS had been eager to assist in filling the water casks, as he believed he would thus acquire information concerning the lay of the land that would prove useful when he and Billy were ready to take leave of the brig. He wondered at the young navigator's absence from the deck as *l'Agile* dropped her anchor in Horta harbor; and was rendered uneasy by learning, from such chance bits of conversation as he could understand, that Billy was to be kept in close confinement until his services should again be required. Still, Dolphus believed he would find some means of effecting the lad's release, and so worked cheerfully enough at the task in hand, at the same time keeping a keen watch of his new surroundings.

He thus selected the point at which he and his companion should land after escaping from the brig, and even traced with his eye the route they should follow to a hiding-place. Much as he hated the privateer, he was, of course, desirous of returning to her once more, and was greatly chagrined when roughly ordered to remain permanently on shore.

For a few minutes the negro stood like one stunned, with all his hopes dashed, and his plans overthrown, staring vacantly at the retreating boat. A stranger in a strange land, penniless, and unable to comprehend a word of Portuguese, the only language spoken in the Azores, he felt utterly helpless, and was intensely miserable. Finally he turned, made his way through the little knot of spectators, who were curiously watching him, and began slowly to climb the steep central street of the town, with a vague idea of finding some place where he could be alone and think without interruption. At length he passed beyond the last straggling huts and came to a wooded forest commanding a superb view of white-walled Horta lying at his feet, the roadstead, the outlying islands, and the sea beyond.

Close at hand bubbled a crystal spring, the water from which dashed down the hillside in a series of sparkling cascades. After drinking gratefully at this, Dolphus found a grassy spot that gave him an uninterrupted view of *l'Agile*, and sat down to contemplate his situation. He could see boats going and coming to and from the brig, and plainly distinguished the movements of men, looking like pygmies on her deck. What interested him most, however, just then, was a thin column of smoke, that, ascending from her galley, reminded him of his own unsatisfied hunger.

“Ef I only had a bite er terbaccier,” he said aloud,

“I wouldn’t feel so powerful hungry; but I hain’t got er mite nor nuffin else. Might as well nebber been bawn, ez — ”

“Cut off a chaw of this, uncle, and see if it don’t fill the bill,” interrupted a deep voice behind him with such startling effect that Dolphus very nearly rolled over the edge of the cliff. He had been too absorbed in his own troubled thoughts to note the coming of the white man, who now stood beside him holding out a small piece of navy twist. This man was young, evidently of great strength, bearded, sunburned, and ragged, while his whole appearance was that of a sailor.

“I reckoned you might speak English,” he continued, seating himself on a fragment of rock close at hand, “and I followed you up here on purpose for a ‘gam.’ Belong to the brig down there, don’t ye?”

“Yes, sah. Dat is, I did, or leastways, I was a kind of a prisoner on board; but now deys lef’ me on sho’, an’ say I kain’t go back no mo’.”

“French, ain’t she?”

“Yes, sah.”

“Privateer?”

“I reckin so.”

“And what are you,—American or British?”

“’Merican, sah.”

“Thought as much. Then I should reckon you’d be glad enough to get away from the bloody pirates.”

“Yes, sah. ’Ceptin’ fer Marse Vance. Ef he was

only here, I wouldn' care ; but dey's got him locked up."

" Who's Marse Vance ? Is he an American, too?"

" Suttinly, sah. Him a young gen'leman midship in de 'Merican Navy."

" You don't say ! What they got him locked up for?"

" 'Case he de onliest nabigator on board, an' so dey dasn't leab him go."

" H'm ! Navigator, is he ?"

" He sholy am. Why, sah, 'twas him bring de brig to dis yer place."

" What's the matter with the captain ?"

" Him daid."

" Oh, ho ! And you say your friend is an American ?"

" Suttinly. Him from York State."

" Would he like to escape from the brig ?"

" Course he would."

" Wouldn't he like better to capture her, and carry her back to the States as a prize ?"

" Golly, boss ! Now you is joking. Same time, dat's de bery ting me an' Marse Vance been projectin' about. But jes' we two kain't do nuffin' of dat kin'."

" Look here, Sambo."

" Dolphus, sah. Dolphus Cicero Ham."

" Well, then, Mr. Ham, s'posin' you come along with me to a place where we can talk this thing

over with some friends of mine, and maybe we can do something to help this Mr. Vance out of his trouble."

At this proposition the black man regarded his new acquaintance doubtfully.

"Oh, it's all right and square. I'm an American same as yourself. Starbuck's my name, and I hail from Nantucket."

The negro's eyes glistened.

"There's six of us here," continued the other, "all belonging to the whaler, *Friend*, that was captured by one of them 'tarnal French privateers a month ago, 'bout a hundred miles to the s'uth'ard of this. We six managed to escape that same night in one of our own boats, and finally made these islands more dead than alive. What's become of the rest of the *Friend's* company, the Lord only knows. Since then we've made a sort of a living by fishing and doing odd jobs for our grub, but in all the time we've been here, not an American ship has touched. In fact, there hasn't been anything in port but a couple of Portuguese traders, and a British cruiser that made us cut for the interior till she was gone, seeing as we didn't care to be pressed into King's Service. Now we want to get away so bad that we're willing to take almost any chances."

"I believe we'd even risked it in our own boat, if we'd had a navigator in the crowd. Same time I'll allow our chances of making port would have

been pretty slim, and so we were almighty glad to see your brig come into the harbor. If she had proved anything but what she is, we'd have gone right aboard and made some sort of a deal with her old man. Soon as we discovered she was French, of course we knowed that wouldn't be no use; and so we was all at sea again. Now, what you have just said has given me a new idea, and if you'll come along I'll explain it to you same time I do to the other lads. What do you say?"

"I says bery good, sah," replied Dolphus. "Also I hopes you'se got somefin' to eat, Marse Starbuck, for I is powerful empty, an' dat's a fac'."

"All right," laughed the other; "I guess we'll manage to fill you up. We mustn't be seen in company, though, so I'll go first, and you follow a bit later. Lay a course back the way you came till you strike water. Then take a sheer to starboard, and count the houses till you come to the sixth. That's Mother Silva's, where we put up. Have you got the price of a meal about you?"

"No, sah; hain't got nuffin."

"Take this then, and give it to the old woman; when she sees it, she'll let you in fast enough."

With this the sailor handed Dolphus a small Portuguese coin. Then he started back toward the town.

A minute later the negro followed him, and, carefully bearing his sailing directions in mind, soon



ERE THE FRENCHMAN COULD FIRE, STARBUCK WAS UPON HIM.

found himself at Mother Silva's boarding-house, eagerly sniffing the delightful odors of garlic, cabbage, and frying fish that pervaded it.

Starbuck took no notice of him until after dinner was over; but while he was eating, Dolphus glanced keenly at the stalwart Americans, and decided that they were the very men to undertake a desperate job.

When his hunger was satisfied, the black obeyed a slight gesture given by Starbuck, and followed him to a room in which the other Americans were already assembled. Here the Nantucket man introduced his new acquaintance, and, in a few words, gave his companions such information regarding the privateer brig as he had picked up. Then he unfolded his plan, which was that they seven should capture *l'Agile* that very night, and then, with Billy Vance as navigator, sail her to the nearest American port. It was a bold project, and drew forth a vast amount of discussion from those before whom it was laid. They asked many questions of Dolphus regarding the strength of the brig's crew, what arms they had, the probability of Billy Vance falling in with their plan, and his knowledge of seamanship. Finally, however, it was decided that the attempt should be made, and Starbuck was unanimously chosen as leader of the expedition.

As the day was now nearly spent, the latter at once began his preparations by sending Dolphus out to dis-

cover how many of the brig's company were on shore, and to pick up any other information concerning them that he could. Then the Americans informed Mother Silva that they were about to start out in their own boat for a night's fishing, — a thing they had done several times before, and which would satisfactorily account for their absence.

Setting forth just before dark, they stretched out of the harbor, but returned soon after nightfall, and took Dolphus aboard at a point some distance beyond the town where he had been directed to await them. He reported that most of the brig's passengers and more than half her crew were on shore, where they seemed inclined to remain until morning. Also that much brandy had been taken on board *l'Agile*, which would seem to indicate that those compelled to remain with her were determined to forget their recent sufferings as thoroughly as possible.

This opinion was confirmed by the sounds of singing and laughter borne across the harbor on the night air, and impatient as the Americans were for action, they waited until nearly midnight for these to cease before venturing on their attempt at a capture. Finally quiet reigned, and with muffled oars they moved silently across the harbor. Not a sound came from the brig as they approached her, and, pulling under her bows, clambered aboard one after another with the agility of cats.

Assembled on the forecastle, they halted for a

moment to listen and then began to move aft. The night was very dark, and one of them, before he was aware of an obstacle in his path, stumbled on a prostrate form that brought him to the deck with a crash. At this several other shadowy forms staggered to their feet, but were promptly knocked down, dragged to the forecastle companionway, and tumbled below. A medley of shouts and curses followed, and a rush was made for the deck, but it was quickly checked by the closing and fastening of the hatch.

Now leaving the others to guard the deck, Reuben Starbuck, guided by Dolphus, hastened aft and into the cabin, with a view to releasing the American midshipman from his confinement. Lieutenant Vigo, who was a light sleeper, had been aroused by the commotion forward, and was just issuing angrily from his room as they appeared. A lamp burning over the cabin table betrayed their presence. The Frenchman levelled a pistol, but ere he could fire, Starbuck was upon him, and the two engaged in the fierce struggle by which Billy Vance was awakened.

CHAPTER XIII

SUCCESS OF THE CONSPIRATORS

As Lieutenant Vigo was a powerful man, he and the Yankee sailor were so evenly matched that for several minutes they fought all over the cabin without either gaining an advantage. Dolphus could not assist Starbuck, as he had his hands full in keeping to their rooms several passengers who, aroused by the struggle, were anxious to learn its cause. Finally, the combatants staggered so heavily against the door behind which Billy Vance was helplessly listening to the conflict, that it yielded with a crash, and they pitched headlong into the room. As they fell, it happened that the lieutenant was undermost, and the first intimation Billy received that either of these precipitate intruders was other than French, came through the exulting exclamation uttered with panting breath:—

“There, you ‘tarnal snake! I guess I’ve got you foul at last!”

“Are you English?” cried the young American.
“No, I’m a Yankee, same as yourself,” came the reply.

Amazed as he was at this recognition, Billy had no

time to ask any of the eager questions that sprang to his lips before the stranger continued:—

“ If you are Mr. Vance, you will help us tie this Frenchman, for he’s slippery as an eel. Get a turn round his legs, and we’ll have him safe.”

Seizing the first thing that offered for this purpose, which happened to be a towel, Billy sprang to comply with this request, only to be met by a kick from the prostrate man that drove him breathless into the middle of the cabin.

The next time he approached more cautiously, and succeeded in accomplishing his object, upon which the sailor somewhat relaxed his hold of the Frenchman’s arms. Almost at the same moment he uttered a loud cry, dealt his foe a stunning blow full in the face, and sank to the floor bleeding from a cruel cut in the abdomen. This was afterwards found to have been made with Starbuck’s own knife, which, loosened in its sheath during the struggle, had fallen to the floor within reach of the Frenchman’s fingers.

In this emergency, matters might have gone badly with the Americans, since Lieutenant Vigo was rapidly regaining his senses, while Dolphus was no longer able to hold in check the several occupants of the staterooms, had not two of the men left on guard become alarmed at their leader’s prolonged absence, and gone aft in search of him. With their aid the fighting lieutenant was so secured that he could do no further harm, the passengers were awed into sub-

mission, and now, for the first time, Billy Vance gained an idea of what had taken place aboard the brig. He was somewhat dismayed to find that he was expected to command her, but quickly rose to the occasion and began to issue his orders. His first care was for Starbuck, whom he caused to be lifted into his own bunk. Then, with the experience he had gained in the hospital, he managed to stanch the outflow of blood, and prepare a rude dressing for the wound. Then, after searching the cabin and state-room for arms, sending on deck all that were found, and leaving one of the Americans on guard with a cocked pistol, Billy, accompanied by Dolphus, went forward to confer with the other sailors.

When these learned who he was, they addressed him respectfully as "Captain Vance." In their opinion the only thing to do was to get every Frenchman out of the brig as quickly as possible, and have her under way by earliest dawn.

"If a word of this business reaches shore before we've gained an offing, the fort'll knock us into a cocked hat," said one.

"Yes, and the French will swarm around us like sharks at a cutting in," remarked another.

There was only one thing done by Billy that did not meet with the approval of his new acquaintances. This was the sending ashore of the passengers' baggage, and especially everything that he thought would add to the comfort of his friend, the general. All

these things he caused to be landed at the remote point where Dolphus had been picked up.

After this certain of the crew were allowed to come on deck, and compelled to sway up the heavy yards. As it was now very near the brig's appointed sailing time, the sounds thus produced did not arouse suspicion on shore, where such persons as were ready to come off waited for a lieutenant to send in a boat.

When all square sails had been set, every Frenchman on board was made to enter the American long-boat, from which the oars had been taken, and which was dropped astern by its painter. Then the brig's cable was slipped, head sails were run up, and *l'Agile*, once more in American hands, was pointed toward the open sea.

After they were under way a single pair of oars was attached to the painter of the boat containing the Frenchmen, and flung overboard. The craft thus cast loose was quickly lost to view, but its position was made known for some time by the clamor that its occupants instantly set up with the hope of being heard on shore.

"We ought to have closed the lubbers' mouths," said one of the Americans, significantly, "and, by hokey ! I believe we can do it yet."

The young captain was too anxious just then regarding the management of his ship to heed this remark, nor, in the faint light beginning to steal over the eastern sky, did he notice what the man was

about to do. He knew that navigation about the Azores was beset with many perils in shape of submerged rocks, and was about to go below for a chart, when he was startled by the report of a musket close behind him.

Whirling about, he was just in time to see the man who had fired lower the piece from his shoulder, with the remark, "I guess that'll quiet 'em."

"What do you mean, sir? How dare you fire a shot aboard this vessel without orders?" cried Billy, as he gained the man's side and snatched away his musket.

"I only wanted to stop them fellers from screeching and rousing the fort," replied the man, sullenly, "and I've done it, too. Don't you notice how quiet they are all of a sudden?"

Ere Billy could make rejoinder, the musket shot was answered by a roar from the shore battery, and a solid shot struck the water half a cable's length ahead of the brig. Evidently the Portuguese had become suspicious of what was taking place in their harbor, and, having ascertained the brig's whereabouts from the musket shot, were now commanding her to heave to that they might investigate her doings.

"Keep her away!" ordered Billy. "Up with your helm! Slack lee braces! Steady! So!"

Then, requesting absolute silence on deck, the lad hastened below for the chart, which it was imperative he should study.

For nearly an hour all went well, though several narrow escapes were made from partially hidden rocks that seemed to leap into sudden existence on every side. Still, it was now light enough to detect these at some distance. Horta was left well behind, and the brig was clearly beyond reach of the battery guns. All hands were breathing more freely, and it seemed as though their desperate undertaking was about to be crowned with success, when, in a moment, their high hopes were dashed.

The sun had risen. Billy, with chart outspread before him, was conning the ship, and, though he was still filled with a sense of anxious responsibility, his spirits were rising with each minute. Dolphus was busy in the galley preparing the breakfast that he had been bidden to have ready as soon as they should gain open water. While matters stood thus, breakers were sighted close at hand, off the port bow. The brig was put about to avoid them, missed stays in the light air, lost headway, drifted, struck, and remained immovable.

At the ominous grating under her keel that sounded a death note to Billy's high hopes, the lad's cheeks paled, and his heart seemed to stop its beating. Then, seeing that his crew still looked to him for orders, he cried:—

“ You are sailors, while I am only a navigator. What is to be done? ”

“ Take soundings, lighten the ship, run out

a kedge, and warp her off," answered one man promptly; while the others agreed that nothing better could be proposed.

"Very well," said Billy, addressing the man who had spoken. "Do you take charge of the operations and get her off if you can. Until she is again afloat I will obey your orders."

There was no thought of breakfast now, nor of anything else save their imminent danger, both from wreck, and of capture by the infuriated Frenchmen, should the latter discover their situation.

Yards were sharply braced and sails laid aback so as to force the brig astern the moment she should float. With desperate effort, the big guns were got overboard, one after another, and dropped into the sea. Shot and spare anchors followed. Soundings were taken, and a heavy kedge anchor, backed by one that was smaller, was carried out astern. Two hours were consumed in these operations, and, ere they were completed, a flotilla of boats was seen heading toward them from the direction of Horta.

"The French are coming!" cried Billy, who made this discovery. "Now, men, as you value life and liberty, get a strain on that hawser that shall either part it or pull her off."

With a shout the Americans sprang to their captain bars, bent their sturdy backs, and threw their whole strength into a mighty effort.

"She moved, I am sure she did!" yelled the young

midshipman, who was gazing over the side. "Now, once more! All together!" With this the lad joined the straining group and added his strength to theirs.

A perceptible movement followed, a sound of grating from under the brig's keel, and then she slid into deep water as though from the greased ways of a launch.

The American yell of delight was answered by a volley of musketry from the leading French boat which had crept up within range, but the hastily aimed bullets flew wide, and no one was hit.

Without waiting to fire a shot in reply the Americans cut the hawser that had saved them, sprang to halyards and braces, and with the leading French boat only fifty feet astern got slow headway on the brig.

A petty officer of the privateer stood erect in the boat, his face distorted with rage, urging his crew to greater effort. They might still have gained the slow-moving vessel had not Dolphus, who was first to find himself at leisure, seized a loaded musket, taken careful aim, and fired with such effect that the Frenchman gave a great leap and pitched headlong among his crew, throwing them into direst confusion.

"That will do," said Billy, as he noted the effect of this shot. "They can't catch us now."

Nor did they; for ten minutes later *l'Agile* had

cleared the last charted rock that lay in her course, and was gliding over the long Atlantic billows with a speed that defied further pursuit.

“Now,” said Billy, “let’s have breakfast before anything else interferes.”

CHAPTER XIV

HOVE TO, AND CHARGED WITH PIRACY

THAT breakfast was the happiest meal Billy Vance had eaten since leaving the *Enterprise* on the other side of the Atlantic several weeks before. At last he was free to return to his native land, with such speed as the winds might grant. Not only that, but he was free to indulge to the utmost the glorious dreams that he had heretofore only cherished with many reservations. Was there ever a happier lad, or a prouder, or one having better reason for satisfaction with himself and his surroundings? Billy thought not, and the crew who looked to him for a safe passage across the broad ocean fully shared his rejoicings as well as his pride in their recent achievement.

Orville Swain, the seaman who had so successfully saved the brig from wreck and had in consequence been chosen to act as mate during the homeward voyage, breakfasted in the cabin with Billy, and now, for the first time, learned the young navigator's history. At its conclusion he offered to give the lad a thorough drill in practical seamanship during their

present cruise, in exchange for a few lessons in mathematics and the use of instruments,— a proposition that Billy promptly accepted.

Nor did they forget poor Starbuck, who lay helpless in the captain's stateroom; but both visited the sufferer, and so comforted him with their cheerful account of recent happenings that he soon afterwards fell into a peaceful sleep.

In all this time they had hardly given a thought to the captive lieutenant, whom they had not dared set adrift in the boat with his compatriots, and who still lay bound and furious on the floor of his own stateroom, whither Billy had caused him to be taken. Now unpleasantly recalled to his existence by the sound of his voice, our lad carried him food and water, but came away leaving him still securely bound.

No sooner had he closed the door behind him, however, than the prisoner, muttering a curse upon the young American, began vigorously sawing the rope confining his wrists back and forth across a broken place in the edge of his washbasin, with what result will appear later.

As Billy regained the deck after having been below somewhat more than an hour, he was rejoiced to find the Azores already growing blue and indistinct with distance, and that the brig was making rapid way on her westward course. Orville Swain had relieved the man at the wheel, and the only other person to be

seen was aloft making some slight repairs to the rigging. All at once this man hailed the deck and reported a sail.

“Where away?” demanded the mate.

“To the northward, sir, and nearly abeam. Looks like a big ship.”

Forgetful of his newly acquired dignity, Billy seized a glass, and, springing into the main rigging, ran aloft with the agility of a monkey. From the royal yard he obtained a clear view of three pyramids of canvas towering above the northern horizon, though the hull supporting them was still invisible. He was almost certain that the stranger was a man-of-war headed southwest. Hurrying to the deck and reporting this news to Orville Swain, they both decided that, as it might be unpleasant to meet a warship of any nationality, so long as none belonging to the United States were known to be in those waters, they must avoid the one now in sight if possible. So the brig was put about and stood, close-hauled to the northward, hoping to cross the stranger's wake so far astern as to be unobserved.

No sooner was this manœuvre accomplished than Billy again ran aloft, but to his dismay saw the stranger in the act of wearing and laying a course that would intercept them. It was evident that the brig had been discovered, and that further information regarding her was wanted. It was also now apparent that the ship was a heavy frigate, and as

Billy watched her the tricolor of France streamed from her main masthead.

This was at once a menace and a relief, for it was possible that, on discovering the brig to be also French, the stranger might be content to hail without boarding. So Billy again descended to the deck, set French colors on *l'Agile*, and ordered that she resume her original course as though reassured by learning the frigate's nationality. At the same time he ordered every stitch of canvas set, including studding-sails from course to royal, with a faint hope of outfooting the larger ship and dropping her astern.

The brig was too short-handed for this operation to be performed quickly; and by the time it was accomplished the frigate, now plainly visible from the deck, was seen to be in full chase under everything that would draw.

"I'm afeard she's got us, Mr. Vance," remarked Orville Swain, quietly, "though we are holding our own mighty well, and if we could only keep out of her reach till dark, we might dodge her during the night. There's her first order now."

As the man spoke, a puff of smoke was seen to rise above the frigate, and in another moment the boom of a heavy gun was borne down the wind to their ears. It was a command for the brig to heave to, and await her pursuer's pleasure.

"Shall we do it, Mr. Vance, or trust to our heels a while longer?" asked Orville Swain.

Ere Billy could answer, the man exclaimed, "Hello! What's up now?"

The French flag had disappeared from the frigate's masthead, and, as all eyes on the brig were anxiously looking to see what she would show next, the crimson ensign of old England appeared in its place.

"A Britisher, by Jingo!" cried Orville Swain. "I thought she looked too square for a Frenchman."

"If she is really an English frigate, I suppose we may as well give in now as later," began Billy, doubtfully. "I hate to, though, for we seem—"

Before the lad could complete this sentence a man sprang from the cabin gangway, leaped upon the unsuspecting steersman with such force as to hurl him to the deck, struck a savage blow with a knife at Billy, which the latter barely avoided by ducking, and again disappeared in the cabin before any one fully realized what had happened.

The brig, which had been staggering under more canvas than she could safely carry, thus left without guidance, flew into the wind. As she did so, there came a sound of crashing and rending from aloft, both royal masts and all studding-sail booms on the starboard side snapped short off, and the poor craft lay as completely at the mercy of her pursuer as a crippled bird before a hunter.

When Orville Swain, dazed, and bleeding from an ugly knife gash in the head, slowly regained his feet, at the same time looking blindly about for the

enemy who had struck the cowardly blow, he instinctively grasped the wheel, with the thought of again pulling the brig on her course. But Billy interfered, and bade him keep her as she was until the frigate should reach them. At the same time he bound a handkerchief about the man's head.

The remaining Americans, together with Dolphus, had by this time tumbled aft, demanding to know what had happened. When they learned that the French lieutenant who had been confined below had in some way freed himself from his bonds, and was the author of all this mischief, they vowed to kill him while they were still masters of the situation. With this purpose in view they started in a body for the cabin ; but Billy checked them, saying:—

“ Hold on, men. It won't take six of us to deal with one Frenchman, and the brig needs instant attention ; for if that frigate is really British, she will probably allow us to remain in possession and continue our voyage. So th'ree of you must do what you can to clear away the wreckage. One man may come below with me. Mr. Swain will keep the wheel as long as he is able, and you, Dolphus, must stand ready to relieve him, at the same time keeping watch of the cabin door ready to shoot down the Frenchman if he should happen to escape us.”

So the young midshipman, with a cocked pistol in one hand and a cutlass in the other, closely followed by one of the American sailors similarly

armed, advanced boldly into the cabin. As no person was to be seen, Billy began a cautious examination of the port staterooms, while his companion undertook a like search on the starboard side.

They had entered the cabin noiselessly and perfected this plan with brief whispers. Now with loudly beating heart, Billy moved softly but ready for constant action toward the first door. Ere he could reach it, he was startled by an outcry from his companion, and thinking he had discovered their common enemy, sprang to join him. He found the sailor standing in the captain's room, staring at Reuben Starbuck, who, bleeding from several ghastly wounds, lay dead in his bunk. The disabled sailor had evidently been the first victim of the Frenchman's cowardly attack, and the two who now sought the murderer gazed in horror at his work.

Only for a minute did they thus pause; and, after assuring themselves that Starbuck was really dead, they turned to renew their search for the miscreant who had done this thing.

Even as they did so a heavy decanter, snatched from the cabin table, and hurled with deadly intent, felled Billy Vance to the floor. A rush of feet, an ineffective pistol shot from the sailor in the cabin, another from Dolphus, and Lieutenant Vigo was again on deck, yelling like a madman with wild gesticulations toward the approaching frigate, which he still believed to be French. He even sprang to

the wheel, hoping to wrest it from the hands of him whom he had already attempted to kill. But this time Orville Swain was on his guard. The Nantucketer was a powerful man, and, forgetting for the moment his present weakness through loss of blood, he seized the Frenchman, lifted him bodily with a mighty effort, and flung him into the sea.

Some days after this Billy Vance woke from what seemed to him a troubled sleep filled with nightmares and fevered dreams. He found himself lying in a bunk, overpowered by weakness, and gazing blankly into the merry sun-tanned face of a young fellow, who was returning his stare with interest.

“Hello! Come to, have you?” exclaimed the latter. “I was just wishing you would, for it’s beastly dull not having any one to talk with. Besides, I want you to help me stand watch.”

“Where am I?” whispered Billy, at the same time striving to recall what had happened.

“Just where you were discovered when the curtain rose on our long and intimate acquaintance,” answered the other. “On board the brig *l’Agile*, of which I, Hal Blount, passed midshipman in his Britannic Majesty’s service, recently attached to the frigate *Fleetwood*, have the honor to be commander.”

“*l’Agile*?” repeated Billy, hazily, as though trying to recall the name.

“Yes; the Frenchman, you know, that you and your brother pirates captured off Fayal and which

the *Fleetwood* was so fortunate as to intercept at the very outset of your piratical career."

"I'm not a pirate," said Billy, indignantly.

"So some of the witnesses stated at the time of your trial; while others declared that you were one of the most piratical pirates that ever sailed under the 'Jolly Roger.' However, you'll have another chance to prove your innocence when we get to Malta, for the case is to be reopened there, and if you are good, I'll testify in your favor."

"But, I don't understand," began poor Billy.

"Neither do I," interrupted Hal Blount; "but the court martial will clear it all up, and either hang or acquit you: so you needn't worry. Now, though, you must go to sleep again and not speak another word until you wake up, for old Sawbones' last order was that you mustn't be excited. So, ta ta, till we meet again."

Here Midshipman Blount left the room, only to thrust his laughing face in at the door again an instant later to remark:—

"Oh! I say. You must hurry out of this, you know, for you are invited to dine with the captain to-morrow, and he's awfully keen on having his guests come to time."

CHAPTER XV

HAL BLOUNT'S SPREAD

THE new commander of *l'Agile* had hardly taken his departure from the stateroom in which Billy Vance lay, when its door was again cautiously opened, and the anxious face of black Dolphus appeared in the aperture. As Billy gave a little cry of glad recognition, the face was illumined by a broad grin, and the negro slipped into the room, softly closing the door behind him. It was almost pitiful to witness the black man's joy at thus finding his companion in adversity not only alive, but restored to reason and on the high road to recovery. For a time he indulged in such extravagant manifestations of delight that Billy found it impossible to gain a single word of the explanations for which he was longing. Finally, however, the negro became quieter, and our young midshipman learned the following facts: —

When Lieutenant Vigo was flung overboard by Orville Swain, the British frigate *Fleetwood*, five days out from Gibraltar, and bound for the West Indies, was so close at hand that, after a long swim, he was picked up by one of her boats and taken aboard. It

seemed that he had sighted her while she was flying a French flag, and believing her to be of that nationality, had determined that the brig should not escape her if he could prevent it. Of course he was bitterly disappointed upon discovering her true character; but, to make the best of his situation, at once claimed the privileges of a prisoner of war, and denounced the Americans on board *l'Agile* as pirates. In this claim he was supported by the fact that a treaty of peace between the United States and France had been signed more than a month earlier, as well as by the condition of affairs discovered on board the brig.

In consequence of these things, and after much deliberation on the part of British officers, the American sailors were offered their choice of being hanged as pirates or entering the King's service, and accepted the latter alternative. As Billy Vance was unable to speak for himself, he also was regarded as a pirate, in spite of the protests of Orville Swain and black Dolphus, both of whom declared the lad to be an officer of the United States navy. So it was finally decided that the brig should be sent to Malta in charge of Midshipman Blount and a prize crew of six men: while Billy should be allowed to remain in her for trial by the British authorities at that place. Black Dolphus, also charged with piracy, was also left on the brig to act as cook during the remainder of her voyage.

These arrangements being completed, and Reuben Starbuck, whom Lieutenant Vigo declared to be the French captain of *l'Agile* murdered by the Americans, having been committed to the deep, the two vessels parted company. Under a full press of canvas the stately frigate with her one prisoner of war and five reprieved pirates, as the unfortunate American sailors were called, bore away to the westward; while *l'Agile*, shorn of much of her beauty by her recent accident, and manned by an English crew, began a tedious beat against adverse winds toward distant Malta. So long was her passage, that Billy Vance was able to leave his room and appear on deck by the time she entered the Strait of Gibraltar. He was intensely interested in seeing at once the coast of Africa on one hand, and the lofty European rock containing the strongest fortress in the world on the other. At the same time he could not forget his own trying situation, nor the terrible charge hanging over him. Thus he proved but a sorry companion for Hal Blount, who was in high spirits at having brought his vessel thus far on her perilous voyage in safety.

L'Agile dropped anchor off Gibraltar to report to the Admiral of the British fleet lying at that station, send despatches ashore, and take in a supply of provisions, but neither Billy nor Dolphus was allowed to leave the ship. It is true they might possibly have effected an escape, and would certainly have made the effort, had there been a single American vessel in

port on which to seek refuge ; but as there was none, the idea was not even considered.

On the second evening of their stay at Gibraltar the young commander of *l'Agile* entertained half a dozen of his friends from the fleet at a small dinner given on board the brig, and Billy was also invited. Among the guests was a conceited and supercilious young officer, who was on his way to Malta, where he was to serve as private secretary to the governor. When Billy was presented to him as an officer of the American navy, this individual stared at our lad through an eyeglass, and remarked sneeringly :—

“ Ah ! most interesting to meet an officer of the American navy ; for, 'pon my word, I had no idea until this moment that the Americans supported such an establishment.”

Flushing hotly, Billy retorted : “ Your education must be limited, sir, if you have never heard of the American ship *Bonhomme Richard*, commanded by Captain John Paul Jones during her successful engagement with the British frigate *Serapis*.”

“ Certainly I know of that notorious pirate on whose head the British government set a price, and who in the engagement of which you speak not only commanded a *French* ship, but was aided by three other vessels of the same nationality. In referring to the American navy, I did not realize that piracy was a legalized institution of your country.”

“ Sir ! ” cried Billy, stepping close to the other, his

face white with passion. "In calling Paul Jones a pirate you utter a deliberate—"

"Stop! For Heaven's sake!" exclaimed the host of the evening, springing between the two young men. "Guy, I am ashamed of you! You forget that this gentleman is our guest—yours no less than mine. If you force a quarrel with him, you will have to deal with me first. Vance, I beg your pardon for having exposed you to insult. Moreover, I hereby declare Captain Paul Jones to have been a naval hero, whom all true seamen must admire and respect."

Several of those present promptly endorsed this sentiment by cries of "Hear! Hear!" whereupon the secretary, without a word of apology, took his hat and made an abrupt departure.

A year later this same person, who was an expert duellist, met several American naval officers in the lobby of a theatre at Malta; and, with the memory of his encounter with Billy Vance still rankling, remarked loud enough for them to hear him: "Those Yankees will never stand the smell of powder." At the same instant he brushed rudely against Midshipman Bainbridge, who was of the party. The latter promptly knocked the offender down, and a challenge followed. Billy's friend, Lieutenant Decatur, acted as second to the young American, and selected pistols at four paces. The governor's secretary had been "out" and faced an adversary's weapon several times before, but never

at so short a distance. He privately protested against it to his second, who carried the objection to Decatur, remarking, "This looks like murder, sir."

"No, sir," replied the American officer; "it looks like death. Your friend has an established reputation as a duellist, while mine is wholly inexperienced."

So, at a distance of but twelve feet apart, the two men faced each other and fired at the word. The secretary was so nervous that he missed his aim entirely, while the ball from Bainbridge's weapon passed through his adversary's hat. Again were the opponents placed, the fatal word was given, and this time the man who had seen fit to insult the American navy fell mortally wounded. Bainbridge was hurried aboard his ship, which soon afterwards sailed, and nothing more was ever heard of the affair. From that day forth, however, such persons as thought slightlyingly of the American navy were very careful not to express themselves upon the subject in the presence of United States naval officers.

All this would have been very soothing to the feelings of our hero, could he have looked forward and known of it; but, as he could not, his impulse was also to withdraw from the dinner party. He begged leave to do this, but both Blount and his guests insisted so strongly upon his remaining that he finally

consented to do so,—a decision for which, as will be seen, he had reason to be thankful throughout the remainder of his life.

After the awkwardness of its opening incident had worn off, the dinner passed pleasantly enough, while the sprightlier conversation of the assembled company reminded the young American of a similar affair in which he had participated some two months before on board the *Philadelphia*. While he was thinking of this, and wondering if he should ever again see an American frigate, he found himself listening to an incident of life in Tripoli that one of the officers, who had recently returned from that city, was relating.

“She was a mere child, though giving promise of great beauty, and my heart ached for her,” said the narrator. “It was in the private slave market to which I had been admitted by special favor, and I was first attracted to her, by hearing her cry out in as good English as I use myself: ‘Oh, mamma! what shall I do? What is to become of your little Ruth?’

“Of course I made inquiries at once and found that she was not English, but was of some foreign nationality, probably American. It seemed that she had been wrecked somewhere on the coast, her friends had apparently been drowned, and she with a handful of survivors had been seized by the Arabs, who first discovered them. Then they were carried

to Tripoli for sale as slaves, which is the cheerful fate of every one so unfortunate as to be wrecked among our dear neighbors of Africa.

“The poor child presented a pitiful picture, and I longed to offer her some comfort; but she was strictly guarded, and I was not allowed to go near her. I found out afterwards that she had been purchased by the Bashaw's agent, and attached to the royal household. A few years hence, if she holds her present promise of beauty, I suppose the old man will marry her, and so she will become an African princess. I only hope she may grow reconciled to her new life before that time. But it is an awful fate at best, and if she had been an English girl, I would have brought her away from that accursed place or lost my life in the attempt.”

“No doubt you would be a regular Don Quixote in aid of distressed beauty,” laughed one of the listeners; but ere the officer could reply, Billy Vance stood beside him, evidently laboring under great excitement.

“Are you sure she was an American?” asked the lad hoarsely.

“Why, yes. Reasonably so.”

“And that her name was Ruth?”

“That is what I heard her call herself.”

“How old was she?”

“About twelve or thirteen, I should say.”

“How long ago was it that you saw her?”

“A little more than four months. Why? Do you think you know the young lady?”

“I am afraid so,” answered Billy. “She may be the daughter of my dearest friend, and if so, I too can only cry out, ‘What shall I do?’”

CHAPTER XVI

LAST RUN OF THE PRIVATEER

So deeply affected was Billy by the startling bit of intelligence that had just come to him, and which he felt certain regarded the only child of his benefactor, that he could think and talk of nothing else. He plied the officer who had seen her with questions, listening eagerly to every scrap of information that he or any of the others could give regarding the Barbary pirates, especially those of Tripoli; and when the dinner party broke up returned to his own room with his brain in a whirl.

What could he do? Should he write to Dr. Dean, and tell him of what he had just learned? No, that would be too cruel; for Ruth might, even now, be beyond hope of redemption. Besides, it was by no means certain that the poor girl of the slave market was Ruth, after all. Even if she were, would not her father suffer less in believing her dead than from a full knowledge of her fate?

He could not apply to the American consul at Tripoli for information, because, as he had just learned, the Bashaw had driven that official from the city, cut down the American flagstaff, and declared

war against the United States, with the hope of obtaining a much greater annual tribute than had heretofore been paid. Oh! If Commodore Dale's stout ships were only in the Mediterranean! If those waters contained but a single American frigate, and he were on board of her! If only the brave little *Enterprise* and her dashing commander were at hand!

But what was the use of wishing for impossibilities? It was not probable that the American squadron had even sailed from home as yet; and if they had, of what service could they be to him, a closely guarded prisoner, charged with a deadly crime for which he was about to be placed on trial? There was nothing, nothing, nothing, that he could do, and, having reached this conclusion, the poor lad flung himself down on his bunk in despair.

On the following morning *l'Agile*'s anchor was again lifted, and she stood away for Malta, bearing with her as despondent and helpless a prisoner as ever trod a deck. Billy was not treated unkindly; on the contrary, he was allowed the freedom of the ship, took his meals in the cabin with Hal Blount, who had conceived a real liking for the otherwise friendless lad, and was so far as possible made to feel himself a guest rather than a prisoner. The ugly fact of his real position could not, however, be forgotten; and even the young Englishman's steady cheerfulness could not lift the black cloud that hung over his companion.

This cloud of unhappiness was made still thicker and darker on the third day out from Gibraltar, as the brig was slowly beating past Cape Gata, by the appearance of a large ship standing to the westward, and boomerang along at a twelve-knot gait under everything that would draw. As they neared each other, the brig displayed a British ensign, and, to the amazement of every one on board, the starry banner of the United States was flung to the breeze from the stranger's mizzen-peak.

Billy's heart leaped within him at this sight of his country's flag, and his eyes filled with tears as he gazed at it with unutterable longings. The stranger was evidently a war-ship; but what one could she be? For a few minutes our lad was greatly puzzled. Then, as the two vessels passed so close that he could distinguish the officers on the American's quarterdeck politely lifting their caps in answer to his frantic wavings, he also read, through a glass, the name traced in golden letters under her stern. In an instant he knew all about her. She was the United States sloop-of-war *George Washington*, Captain William Bainbridge, which had been sent out the year before with the last instalment of tribute ever paid by the American government to the Barbary pirates. Now, after having been compelled to submit to repeated indignities, and barely saving his ship from seizure by the Dey of Algiers, Captain Bainbridge was on his way home with tidings of the

outrages committed by the insolent Turks, and their general declaration of war against the United States.

Billy knew all this as soon as he read the frigate's name. He knew that she held his own people, and was homeward bound. He was as certain as he was of his own being, that, if those whom he saw on her quarterdeck could be informed of his presence, and the danger of his position, the great ship would instantly be arrested in her homeward flight, not to resume it until he was safely on board. And yet he was powerless to communicate with them. It was too hard! too cruel! The lad could have wept at his own impotence.

Suddenly another thought flashed into his mind. Would he go, if he could? Was not Ruth Dean calling upon him for aid at that very moment? Though he was not sure that the poor girl seen in the slave-market of Tripoli was Ruth, did not his duty demand that he make some effort to discover her identity? Could he, even if the opportunity were offered, leave that part of the world while there was the remotest chance of assisting her? Of course the probabilities were a thousand to one that he might never again hear from her, or be in a position to help her, if, indeed, she were in need of his aid; but could he afford to neglect the one chance remaining? Certainly not. He might be a prisoner, helpless and friendless, but he was not a coward. How clearly he now recalled his last words to Dr.

Dean: "I will make it my business to hunt the dear girl up, as soon as I reach the other side, and see that she does not come to harm." That was an obligation not lightly to be set aside.

With his promise fresh in his mind and strengthened by it, though he could not now see any way to its fulfilment, our lad heaved a deep sigh, and resolutely turned away from the alluring sight of the fast-receding frigate.

Midshipman Hal Blount had stood unnoticed close behind him, and now, laying a sympathetic hand on Billy's shoulder, he said:—

"It's awfully rough on you, old man. I know just how you feel, and I'd give all my hopes of promotion to be able to signal that ship and put you on board. I would, 'pon honor; but you realize how I am placed, and can understand."

"Yes. I know and I understand," replied the young American; and then, unable to bear longer the sight of the vanishing frigate, he abruptly left the deck, and fled to his own room, from which he did not again emerge that day.

Not long after this, the brig having made a safe run through the Skerki channel, and passed the lofty headland of Cape Bon, was laying a course to the southward of Pantellaria, when a suspicious-appearing, felucca-rigged craft was observed creeping out from the eastern side of the island and heading toward them.

The young commander of *l'Agile* regarded her for a few minutes uneasily, and then handed his glass to Billy, saying: —

“I am afraid that ship means mischief. What do you make her out to be, Vance?”

“She is flying a white crescent in a red field,” answered the latter, after a steady look.

“Just what I thought. A bloody pirate, and she'll make short work of us if she catches us, too. If we only had the guns you threw overboard at Fayal, we'd teach her a lesson; but, as we haven't, we must make a run of it. Just as we ought to be preparing for a blow, too, for the glass is falling like sixty. However, here goes for a pair of heels.”

With this Hal Blount began to issue his orders; and in another moment every soul on board the brig, including Billy Vance and black Dolphus, was hard at work loosing and sheeting home her lighter sails, until she staggered under a cloud of canvas reaching from rail to truck and outspread like enormous wings on either side.

Upon her first appearance of running away, the felucca had fired a gun and started in hot pursuit. So evenly matched were the two vessels that when darkness overtook them their relative positions were unchanged, though it was evident that with the increasing strength of the wind, which was now assuming the proportions of a gale, the Turkish craft was carrying her canvas much more easily than the brig.

With each passing minute the crew of the latter looked to see their lofty spars, recently replaced at Gibraltar, go by the board, but Hal Blount held grimly on so long as a streak of daylight lasted.

Then he gave the anxiously awaited word to strip the brig to her smallest possible working canvas, and at the same time altered her course, which had been nearly south to west. He did this in the belief that the felucca would expect him to stand to the eastward, or toward the open sea, rather than toward the land, and would accordingly search for him in that direction. At the same time he realized the danger of a lee shore in the dirty weather promised for the night, and, after holding his new course for half an hour, put his ship about and began to work back over the way he had come. By this time the gale was upon them, and by midnight it had assumed the proportions of a mistral, the most dreaded wind-storm of the Mediterranean. The night was black as pitch, the blast was bitterly cold, and roared with the voice of ten thousand bulls, while the brig seemed to groan with agony as she strained and labored amid the great seas that incessantly swept her decks.

An hour or so after midnight the two midshipmen, crouched in the lee of a deck-house, hoping against hope that their laboring craft might still gain a safe offing, became aware of a new sound louder even than that of the gale, and each clutched at the other's arm to attract his attention to it. This was the unmis-

takable roar of breakers ; but instead of being under their lee, the sound came down the wind. At the same time the height of the seas was sensibly decreased. What had happened? were they under shelter of an island? would it be possible to anchor?

Hal Blount sprang for a lead with which to take soundings; but ere he could lay his hands on it the brig struck with such force that every person on board was flung violently to the deck, and her foremast snapped short off, dragging down the main topmast as it fell. Lifted on great rollers, she struck again and again, each time borne farther in among the yeasty waters that snarled and leaped at her like wolves with gleaming teeth, until at length she remained immovable. At the same time she gave no sign of breaking up, and after awhile it became evident to all on board that the sea was decreasing in violence and no longer dealt them such terrible blows as at first, though the mistral still roared with unabated fury.

“ I don’t understand the situation at all,” shouted Hal Blount at length ; “ but at any rate we seem to be safe enough for the present. So I move we go below to warm up a bit and get something to eat. Come, my men,” he added, addressing the crew, who had been driven aft by the torrents of water breaking over the brig’s bows. “ There is room enough in the cabin for us all, and from this on we must share and share alike.”

CHAPTER XVII

WRECKERS OF THE KERKENAH BANK

THE ill-fated brig had swung round upon striking and been driven stern first on to the reef, so that now, while her forward deck was still swept by the in-rolling seas, her after-cabin was dry and uninjured. Here, then, the young commander assembled his entire ship's company and took counsel with them. First he served out a liberal ration of grog, while Dolphus produced such food as he could lay hands upon.

As the cabin lights were still in a condition for burning, the place seemed uncommonly snug and cheerful in comparison with the storm-swept blackness of the outer night. Under these conditions the spirits of those now assembled within it gradually rose until they were quite ready to make another brave struggle for life. They had fully expected death and resigned themselves to meet it; but it had passed them by for the moment, and, if their stricken craft could hold together until daylight, they might possibly elude it, after all.

When the men were warmed and fed, the young commander, still cool and fearless, as became one of his race and station, clearly defined their situation

as he understood it, and called for an expression of opinion on what was best to be done. "I don't know just where we are," he said, "but I believe somewhere off the coast of Tunis, it may be under the lee of a low-lying island. At any rate, there seems little chance that our ship will ever float again, and it is equally certain that we are in pirate waters. If daylight discovers us to the natives of these parts, we must either fight for our lives, or submit to their pleasure, which will be to kill us at once or reserve us for slavery. We may find that we still have a boat left fit for service, in which case we can either run for the land and trust to the mercy of those whom we shall meet, or we can make a shift to fetch Malta, which must still be some two hundred miles away. If we do that, we shall run a slight chance of falling in with some Christian ship; and a much greater one of being picked up by one of the pirates who swarm in these waters. We are nine men, all told, with an ample supply of small-arms and ammunition, but no great guns with which to defend our ship. In stating these facts, and asking for your advice, I do so as a young man seeking counsel from those older and more experienced than himself. At the same time I want it perfectly understood that I am not attempting to shirk my responsibility; nor do I relinquish for an instant the command intrusted to me. In whatever course I may be guided by your advice or my own judgment, I shall still ex-

pect you to follow me and obey my orders with the bravery and readiness of true blue British seamen."

"Hooray!" shouted the sailors, who had listened intently to every word of this speech.

"We'll stand by you, sir, never fear," cried one.

"An' wotiver you thinks best to do, sir, is wot we likewise thinks best," added another.

Thanking his men for this display of confidence in him, and seeing that nothing in the way of advice was to be had from them, Hal Blount turned to Billy Vance and asked if he had any suggestion to offer.

"Only that we make what preparations we may, for any event, while we still have time for them."

"Very good advice, and exactly what I propose to do," said the young commander. Then he ordered that all muskets within reach be collected, cleaned, and carefully loaded. Also that a store of provisions, water, and other necessities for a voyage in a small boat be made ready; and, when these things had been done, it only remained for them to await as patiently as might be the coming of daylight.

The earliest gleam of dawn found all hands on deck, anxiously impatient to discover their position. At first they could see only foam-crested billows leaping savagely at the brig from every direction. Then, a vast network of reef, rock, and bar, threaded by narrow channels, was gradually unfolded, until it was incredible that their vessel should have en-

tered so far among them without striking, and certain that she could never again be extricated from their entangling meshes. Finally the open sea appeared fully a mile distant, and they could trace the crooked way up which they had been driven. At the same time they made out a large island lying a few miles to the southward; and at length discovered, so far away as to be blue with distance, a mountain range that they knew must mark the mainland.

At this, Hal Blount, who had carefully studied his charts in the cabin, uttered a shout. "Now I know where we are," he cried. "This is the great Kerkenah Bank that extends for nearly fifty miles off shore. The land to the southward is Kerkenah Island, and that range of mountains is the Sfax. How we got here is a mystery, and how we are to get away is another."

The attention of all hands was now turned to the condition of their ship, which was pitiable in the extreme. Her bows had been crushed in by the hammer of the seas, and were covered with the chaotic wreckage of masts and spars. Only the space from the mainmast aft was wholly free from water. The longboat, stowed amidships, was a total wreck; while one of the quarter boats was also broken beyond hope of speedy repair. The other was badly injured; but not hopelessly so, and an attempt to render this craft seaworthy was instantly begun.

After seeing this work well under way the young

commander, inviting Billy to accompany him, ascended the main shrouds to the masthead for a comprehensive view and an uninterrupted discussion of their situation.

The sky was leaden, and a fierce blast still swept in from the sea. The prospect on all sides was dreary and discouraging in the extreme. Still, as Hal Blount cheerfully remarked, they might have been much worse off than they were.

“It is God’s mercy, Vance, that we did not strike on that outer reef,” he said; “for if we had, the ship would have been kindling-wood in less than ten minutes, and we — well, I doubt if there would have been enough of us left to identify. How she reached her present berth is one of the mysteries that can never be explained. Now, what comes next? Even with our boat repaired and launched we could hardly hope to thread those reefs in safety, nor could she live in the open sea.”

“No,” replied Billy. “It is certain that we must wait until the gale subsides.”

“And then,” interrogated the other, “shall we make for that island, for the main, or shall we try for Malta?”

“I am afraid I’m not exactly in a position to advise you,” replied Billy, soberly; “for to me there doesn’t seem much to choose between capture by pirates, or hanging as one, which is my promised fate if you succeed in getting me to Malta.”

“Nonsense!” cried Hal Blount, “they won’t hang you for what you did, any more than they will hang me for losing this brig. So you may rest easy on that score.”

“Then,” said Billy, greatly relieved, for until that moment he had really considered himself in imminent danger of being hanged by the British authorities, “I say, make the try for Malta, by all means.”

“I say so too,” agreed the other, “and I only hope we’ll get the chance. But look yonder. If I’m not mightily mistaken, there come some chaps who will have something to say regarding our future movements.”

With this the young Englishman pointed toward Kerkenah Island, at the same time handing his glass to Billy.

A single glance through it disclosed to the latter two sharp-pointed lateen sails, looking in the distance like gulls’ wings, approaching them from the southward.

The keen-eyed wreckers of the great Tunisian bank had already discovered the stranded vessel, and were descending upon this heaven-sent spoil of the sea like vultures upon a stricken quarry.

“Those chaps are mighty good sailors, pirates or no pirates,” observed Billy, as he critically noted the handling of the oncoming boats.

“There’s no doubt of that,” admitted Hal Blount, “and what else they are we shall very soon find out.

There's one thing certain, though: they can't come aboard this ship without fighting for the privilege; so let's go and prepare to receive them."

With this the two midshipmen made their way to the deck, from which the lateen sails were still invisible, and reported their discovery.

"It will be a couple of hours yet before they can get here," said Hal Blount, "and work on that boat must continue till the very last minute."

While the crew hastened their labor of getting the little craft, on which all their hopes of safety were now centred, ready for sea, Hal and Billy brought up arms and ammunition from the cabin. At the same time Dolphus, who had succeeded in recovering his stove from the galley, continued his preparations for a meal as though nothing else were of importance.

Of course many an anxious glance was cast toward the rapidly approaching sails; but until the word to "knock off" was given, not a man slighted his appointed task to watch them.

Finally, when the boats were so close that each could be seen to contain a dozen men, black-bearded, swart-faced, and armed with long-barrelled guns, all hands were ordered to take stations to repel boarders, and Hal Blount fired a musket toward the approaching craft, as a hint that their presence was not desired.

Instead of discouraging the pirates, this shot had

exactly the opposite effect, since it was almost an assurance that the brig had no big guns with which to oppose them. At the same time it notified them that resistance was to be expected, and the boats immediately separated, making wide sweeps, so as to approach the wreck simultaneously from opposite sides. They then bore down on her, at the same time opening fire from both directions.

At the first shot, Hal Blount ordered his men to take shelter behind the bulwarks, but he remained standing, so as to command a full view of the situation. Suddenly he uttered a great cry, and staggering forward, with hands pressed against his side, fell to the deck. In an instant Billy Vance had sprung to his assistance.

“Don’t mind me, Vance,” said the wounded lad faintly. “Take command, and beat the beggars off.”

“Hold your fire, men,” cried Billy; “we have only five shots left, and every one must tell. Wait till they are close alongside. Now—give it to the starboard boat.”

At this the eight muskets rang out as one, and a crashing volley was poured among the crowding figures in the nearest boat, who had risen to their feet to spring aboard. The effect was terrible, but the brig’s defenders had no time to note it, for the second boat was also alongside, and the fierce faces of its crew were already appearing above the rail.

Snatching an extra musket, Bill fired at the first of these, and it disappeared with a scream of agony.

Armed with cutlasses, the brig's people rushed forward in a body, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle was begun. After the first rush, Billy Vance had no clear conception of what was taking place. He only knew that he was slashing right and left with all his might, nerved by a fury that seemed to fill his arms with muscles of steel. All at once he found himself confronted by a huge Turk, who was striking at him savagely with a great curved scimitar. The young American knew nothing of the art of fence, and would surely have been cut down had he not slipped and fallen. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of cruelly gleaming eyes, and of the flashing scimitar uplifted for its fatal blow.

At that moment black Dolphus, seeing his peril, launched himself head foremost like a catapult at the exulting Turk, catching him in the pit of the stomach, and hurling him breathless ten feet away. Ere the Mussulman could recover, Dolphus was again upon him and had run him through the body with the keen-edged carving-knife that he had chosen as the weapon best suited to his experience.

CHAPTER XVIII

THROUGH THE BREAKERS OF DEATH

WITH the fall of their leader,—for such the big Turk, who had been first butted, and then spitted by Dolphus, proved to be,—the wreckers lost heart and gave way, scrambling madly for their boats, with the brig's defenders close at their heels. Some of them leaped overboard in their panic, while such as were too badly wounded to join in the flight were despatched and flung after the others by the infuriated sailors. Of the brig's crew, one had been killed during the struggle, and all bore bloody traces of its severity.

As the pirate craft hastily shoved off, a few musket shots were fired after them, and it was not until they had pulled beyond range, that the brig's people began to think of their own hurts.

Billy Vance, finding himself once more placed in command of the vessel with which his fortunes had become so strangely linked, gave his first attention to the young Englishman, whom he had come to regard as a dear friend. Hastening to where Hal Blount lay, he was dismayed to find that he had fainted from loss of blood, and was to all appearance

dead. Calling Dolphus to his assistance, the two bore the wounded lad below, and into the captain's stateroom, of which Hal had taken possession on assuming command. Here they used every effort to restore him to consciousness, but without avail. After an examination of the ghastly wound through which the sufferer's life-blood was draining, Billy had not entertained any hope, while as they deposited their burden, Dolphus muttered half aloud:—

“Two mans already die in dat ar bunk, an' dey was boun' to be one mo', afore de v'y'ge come to hits end.”

After awhile the young American returned to the deck, leaving the negro to watch beside the wounded lad. He found the sailors attending to their own hurts, and casting watchful glances at the pirates, who had hauled up on a sand-pit half a mile away. As Billy looked in that direction, a column of black smoke rose from the place where the pirates were gathered. In a moment it was smothered, and then allowed to reappear,—an operation that was again repeated a minute later, after which no more smoke was seen.

“It is evidently a signal,” said Billy, approaching the group of sailors, “and probably intended to summon assistance. In which case it is more than likely that, before many hours are passed, we shall again be attacked, and by an overwhelming force. Under the circumstances, what do you men think we ought to do?”

“What does Mr. Blount say?” asked one of the sailors.

“He is not capable of saying anything,” replied Billy, sadly, “and I fear he will never speak again.”

“Do you mean that he is dead, sir?”

“No. But I believe he is dying.”

For a moment the sailors whispered together. Then he who acted as their spokesman said:—

“We’d like to look at the captain, sir, if you don’t mind.”

“Certainly you may,” replied Billy. “I was about to ask you to do so, with the hope that you might suggest something for his relief.”

So the little company went below, and, with uncovered heads, filed silently into the chamber of death. A single glance from each at the white face and closed eyes of their young commander was sufficient; and as they tiptoed heavily away, more than one brawny hand was swiftly brushed across a moistened cheek.

“Well,” said Billy, as they regained the deck, “is there anything to be done?”

“I’m afeared not for him, sir.”

“What, then, for ourselves?”

“We’d like to hear from you, sir.”

“Do you mean that you will obey my orders? Remember that I am an American.”

“Americans and British are all of one blood, sir, especially when it comes to fighting black pirates like

them yonder; and you being a hofficer, it's only right as you should take the lead."

"Very good," replied Billy, "I will do the best I can. At the same time I give you fair warning that I don't believe any one of us has the slightest chance of escaping with his life. Still, we won't give in until we have to, and the first thing I want you to do is to eat as hearty a meal as ever you can; for there's no knowing when we may have a chance at another. Then finish repairing that boat, and get her into the water as quickly as possible. In the mean time keep a sharp lookout on those pirate chaps, and let me know if they make a move."

Having given these instructions, Billy again went below, to relieve Dolphus and send him on deck.

Never had our lad passed so solemn an hour as the one that followed; and, while he sat gazing at the placid face before him, his thoughts were such as only come to one in the first flush of life, when brought face to face with death. At the beginning of that hour Hal Blount was still faintly breathing; at its end the brave young heart had ceased to beat; but when the released spirit took its flight the lonely watcher never knew. In fact, he did not realize that the angel of death had stood beside him in that narrow room, until Dolphus came to bring him food, and report several more lateen sails as visible from the masthead.

At that moment Billy could not eat, and so, after

first covering the dead form of his friend with a British ensign that he found in the brig's flag locker, he hurried on deck. There he found the boat ready to launch, and the men anxiously awaiting his appearance. First he bade them go below for a last look at their young commander, while he went aloft with his glass.

The two pirate boats that had made the attack of a few hours before still lay beside the sand-bar from which their crews had sent up a signal. Beyond them were half a dozen more of the wicked-looking lateen sails still some miles away, but hastening in the direction of their friends. The gale had sensibly abated, and before leaving his post of observation, our young navigator made a careful study of the channel up which the brig had been driven, and by which he was now planning to escape. Having charted on his memory every turn of the tortuous waterway, he descended to the deck, where he found a very sober-faced group of sailors awaiting him.

“Now, men,” he cried, “get that boat overboard. Put in provisions, water, and arms. There won’t be room for anything else. Then get into her yourselves, and by that time I will be ready to join you.”

With this Billy hastened below, and made his way to the brig’s magazine, which was located directly beneath the cabin floor. Here he stove in the head of a small keg of powder, poured its contents on the floor, and into them thrust one end of a slow match

that would burn for ten minutes. Regaining the cabin, he found a general chart of the Mediterranean, a chronometer, sextant, and nautical almanac, all of which he carried on deck.

The boat was already launched and stowed, and the men were taking their places in her as he appeared. On the other hand, the pirates, joined by the friends whom they had summoned, were getting under way. There was no time to be lost, and bidding his men wait for him a minute longer, Billy returned to the cabin. First he stepped into the captain's stateroom, and drew a corner of the flag from the face of his dead friend. "Good-bye, Hal Blount," he said softly; "you were a brave fellow whom I am glad to have known, and I shall never forget you. Good-bye, old man!"

Then he gently replaced the crimson covering, tucked it about the motionless form as though the latter were that of a sleeping child, and, with tear-dimmed eyes, turned from the room that had witnessed so much of suffering and tragedy.

Taking a lighted candle, he again entered the magazine, where the dropping of the tiniest spark would have blown him into eternity, and, with steady hand, applied its flame to the match already prepared. He watched until the deadly fuse was well aglow, and then made his way with all speed to the deck.

The brig's crew were impatiently awaiting him, the lateen sails of the pirates were already headed

toward the wreck, and as the lad swung himself lightly into the tossing boat it was shoved off. For a few minutes the little craft, impelled by the lusty arms of the four strongest among the sailors, was hidden behind the stranded hulk, and when it finally shot into view of the pirates it had gained a good quarter of a mile. The moment it was seen a chorus of fierce yells broke from the oncoming feluccas, and they were instantly headed in pursuit.

Now came Billy's moment of greatest anxiety, and he watched every move of the pirates with the intentness of one whose life hangs in a balance. If all the murderous craft should persist in following the chase, there was no more hope for the fugitives than for a hare running in the open before a pack of hounds; but if any should turn aside to board the wreck, there might still be a chance of escape. He had not told his companions of what he had done, and now, at the sight of the swift-sailing feluccas swarming after them; they were inclined to relax their efforts in despair, but the young American urged them on.

“Don't give up yet!” he cried. “We have still a chance, and it would be cowardly to throw it away. There! Look! One of them has turned toward the brig. There goes another and another. Pull, men! pull for your lives!”

It was even as the lad had said. First one of the pursuing craft, moved by cupidity and eager for the

looting of the wreck, turned in that direction ; others quickly followed, until but two held to the chase.

With blanched face at the thought of what he hoped might happen, and yet dreaded to see, Billy Vance watched the feluccas swiftly approach the brig. One after another he saw them range alongside, saw the brown sails drop like folding wings, and saw the swart crews swarm on deck. For an eternity of seconds he ceased to breathe, and his heart stopped its beating.

Then it came : an awful burst of lurid flame leaping toward the heavens, a stunning crash, a horrid vision of human forms hurled in the air, and a black, slowly spreading pall of smoke that covered everything.

“Oh, my God !” gasped one of the sailors.

“Pull, men, pull !” cried Billy Vance, fiercely. “Our one chance of escape is offered, and now or never we must accept it.”

CHAPTER XIX

LYING LOW, BUT CAUGHT AT LAST

THE explosion by which a score of the Tunisian sea-wolves had been blown to fragments momentarily paralyzed those who remained. With its numbing shock the two boats that had continued the pursuit seemed lost to control. They flew into the wind, with their brown sails shivering, as though in terror, and lay so for several minutes. Then, as the pall of smoke slowly drifted to leeward of the place where the wreck had been, they stood back to the rescue of such survivors as might still be picked up.

In the mean time the fugitives, animated by the words of their young leader, were bending to their oars with a new courage, that rapidly increased the distance between them and those who had sought their lives.

As for Billy Vance, now that his self-imposed but dreadful task was accomplished, he sank back in the stern sheets of the boat, weak and faint with a reaction from the nervous strain of the last few hours. He had eaten nothing that day, and when Dolphus brought him food he at first refused, then eagerly devoured it.

The dusk of another night was enfolding the wrecked men by the time they reached the end of the channel leading to the open sea, and were confronted by a heaving waste of leaden waters. The infuriated Turks had again set forth in pursuit, and with the last of the fading light their sharp-pointed sails could be seen glancing swiftly down the channel that they knew so well, but through which the fugitives had been compelled to pick their way with the utmost caution.

If the latter remained where they were under the slight shelter of the last outlying bank, they would certainly be overtaken and killed; on the other hand, it seemed hardly possible that their small over-crowded boat could outlive the pending hours of darkness on the troubled sea outspread before them. Still, the gale had decidedly moderated, the waves no longer ran so high as they had earlier in the day, and a venture among them formed the sole visible chance of escape.

“It is all we can do,” said Billy, as he gave orders for stepping the boat’s mast and setting its small sail. “Those fellows behind us rank among the best sailors of the world. They know these waters better than they know anything else, and if they catch us, they will undoubtedly put us to death by slow torture. Let us then trust ourselves to the mercy of the sea rather than fall into their hands.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered several of the men.

Then the little boat plunged bravely into the outer darkness, and began a sturdy breasting of the tall waves, by which it was tossed to and fro like the veriest cockle-shell. To be caught in a trough of that sea would mean to be rolled over and over like a bottle; consequently every effort was directed toward keeping the frail craft head on, and right side up. So only the most experienced among the sailors were allowed to steer and trim sheet; while the others lay in the bottom to keep the centre of gravity as low as possible and take turns at bailing.

It was a terrible night, and long before it was ended some of the men were completely exhausted, while the strength of the others was well-nigh spent. At first, and for several hours, they watched anxiously for their pursuers, and fancied they saw in each darkly outlined wave-crest the ominous peak of a lateen. At length, however, these fears were allayed, and gave way to a sense of their own misery, which they expressed with bitter words and loud murmurings. A portion of these were directed against Billy Vance, but the young American took no note of them other than to redouble his efforts at cheer and encouragement. Sometime after midnight he discovered the faint twinkle of a star, and pointed it out as a joyful sign that the foul weather was passing. Then came another and another, each hailed with gladness, until finally a large area of the heavens was cleared of its clouds, and the course of the boat could be directed

with certainty. By this time, too, the sea had so subsided that there was no longer any danger of swamping, and the exhausted crew were enabled to obtain brief snatches of sleep.

When this respite was allowed, the soundest sleeper of all was black Dolphus, who, as a cook rather than a sailor, felt no responsibility regarding the handling of the boat, and was also fully convinced that Billy's skill as a navigator would carry them safely through their present difficulties. His only growl was made when aroused by daylight and he realized how poor a breakfast he would be able to serve without the aid of a fire. The others were already anxiously scanning the ever-widening space of sea behind them, with a dread of discovering the pursuing sails of the Kerkenah wreckers. With each minute, however, their spirits rose, for none was in sight, nor could they discover any trace of the coast from which they had come.

Suddenly all were attracted by a shout from Dolphus, who was standing in the bow of the boat, staring ahead as intently as they had looked astern.

“Dar’s a place whar we all kin lan’ and make a fiah, Marse Vance,” he cried. “Look like a island, but I reckon hit big enough for all de operations ob de cookin’, seein’ as we only wants to make coffee an’ scramble up a mess ob ’scouse.”

Instantly the others were on their feet, gazing eagerly in the direction indicated by the negro. Sure enough, there was a blue point that could be

nothing but land, rising sharply from the surrounding waters. It was still dim with distance, but it lay directly in their course, and one of the sailors declared it must be the heights of Valetta on the island of Malta.

“No,” said Billy, “that can’t be; for even the brig could not have brought us within sight of Malta in the time we have been out. It may be Lampedusia, and probably is, since that bit of rock lifts itself four hundred feet above the sea, and can be sighted for a long distance. In that case, though, instead of attempting to land, even for breakfast, we must give it a wide berth; for I don’t believe the wild fishermen occupying it would give us any better reception than the pirates we have just left behind. Of course I have never been here before, and can’t speak from experience, but Mr. Blount said that these were pirate waters, in which every man who had not proved himself a friend must be regarded as an enemy.”

“The captain’s right,” agreed one of the men. “I’ve heard enough about the bloody pirates of these parts to be willing to steer clear of ‘em, and to eat every breakfast of my life without cooking, rather than run afoul of them weak-handed.”

So, with a sigh of resignation, Dolphus served a meal of hard biscuit, raw salt pork, and water, which was eaten with gusto and declared good by the hungry sailors.

After breakfast Billy produced his chart, pointed out to his companions the exact spot where he believed them to be at that moment, and cheered them greatly by declaring that, if they could hold their present rate of sailing for twenty-four hours longer, another sunrise ought to reveal to them the high lands of Malta.

Some of the men talked happily of what they would do, and of the good times they would have with the comrades whom they expected to meet in that British outpost; but neither Billy nor Dolphus could quite share these pleasant anticipations. In fact, a dread of the charge hanging over them was still so great, that the former pledged the other occupants of the boat to secrecy regarding it. He also gained from each a promise to say, if questioned, that the Americans had been held as prisoners aboard the French privateer, which was strictly true.

Of course Billy could make no plans as to his own movements when they should reach Malta, but hoped in some way to return to Gibraltar, and there await the American squadron to which he was attached. At the same time Dolphus declared his intention of following the young midshipman wherever he should go, until given the opportunity of enlisting aboard an American man-of-war destined to operate against the Barbary pirates, for whom the black man entertained a bitter hatred.

So the shipwrecked sailors talked and planned,

while their little boat sped merrily onward before a favoring breeze until they were nearly abreast the island of Lampedusia, though several miles to the southward.

About this time some one discovered a sail that had apparently come from the island, standing to the westward.

“I am glad that craft is not coming our way,” said Billy; “for she might prove unpleasant on close acquaintance.”

Hardly had the lad spoken when the stranger was seen to put about, and lay a course that would almost certainly intercept their own should they continue as they were.

“Down sail, unstop the mast, and lie low!” ordered Billy, promptly. “She may pass without sighting us, and, at any rate, we must give her every chance to do so.”

So the boat remained motionless on the sparkling waters; while her crew, peering over a gunwale, watched anxiously the movements of the stranger. They even whispered hoarsely to one another in commenting on her appearance, as though fearful lest the sound of their voices should attract attention.

From the first her square sails forward and great after lateen showed her to be a large felucca, and after awhile Billy, who was scanning her through a glass, declared his belief that she was the very

corsair from which the brig had run two days before.

Still, he, together with the others, hoped she would pass without noticing them, which she would have done had she held the tack on which she was then standing for half an hour longer. But some irresistible fate seemed to draw her toward them, and the fugitives uttered a groan of dismay as the felucca again came about and stood in their direction. She was only beating to the southward with short boards; but seemed to be searching the sea as a hound, at fault, quarters a field in quest of scent. Now they watched her with a keener anxiety than ever; for if she should again go about, before reaching a point from which they would be seen, they might still escape discovery; but if she did not, they would be very apt to attract her attention.

So they waited in silence, crouching as low as possible, until they could distinguish the grinning cannon in her ports, and human figures on her lofty poop. They could discern the white water curling from her sharp prow, and seemed to hear the singing of the wind through her taut rigging. From her masthead streamed the crescent flag of the Barbary pirates, and those in the boat ground their teeth at sight of the cruel emblem.

“Hurrah! She is again putting about, and we are safe.” The shipwrecked sailors almost shouted their joy, at sight of the fluttering sails and sound of the

creaking yards. Then their exultation was changed to despair; for, instead of standing away, close hauled, the felucca rounded sharply to, and headed directly for the motionless boat. They had been discovered at the final moment, and their enemy was upon them.

CHAPTER XX

MAHOMET SOUS, THE PIRATE

As there was no longer any occasion for concealment, the occupants of the boat relieved their constrained positions, by sitting up and watching moodily the approach of the felucca. So swiftly did she come that in less than five minutes she had swept past them, tossing their craft aside on the wave rolling from her bow, and shot into the wind within easy hail. Her rail was crowded with dark faces that regarded them with scowling curiosity. For a full minute they were thus observed in silence. Then a white-robed figure on the felucca's afterdeck commanded in broken but understandable English:—

“Come closer.”

“We might as well obey without hesitation,” said Billy Vance; “for they could, if they chose, blow us out of the water with a single shot.”

So the sailors sullenly got out their oars and reluctantly pulled alongside the pirate.

“Throw a line,” was the next command, and this was also done.

“Who are you?” asked the captain of the felucca,

whom Billy afterwards found to be named Mahomet Sous.

“Answer,” whispered the young American to the man who sat nearest him.

“Shipwrecked British sailors,” replied this individual.

“Which is your captain?”

The man pointed to Billy.

“Let him come aboard.”

The end of a rope was lowered, our lad knotted it about him, and was drawn up the felucca’s side. Reaching the deck, he was led aft to where the captain awaited him.

“What was your ship, where was she wrecked, and when?” demanded Mahomet Sous.

“The brig *l’Agile*, lost in the gale of two days ago, on the Kerkenah Bank,” replied Billy.

“Was not that the brig I chased?”

“We were chased by a felucca,” was the evasive reply.

“And chose to wreck your vessel rather than to let me have her. For that shall you suffer.”

“I had nothing to do with it, for I was not her commander,” argued Billy.

“Who was?”

“An officer of the British navy.”

“Where is he now?”

“Dead.”

“Who killed him?”

“Some bank pirates who attacked us.”

“Ha! that accounts for the wounds of your crew. The men of the bank should have killed you all for daring to resist them. Why did they let you go?”

“They chose rather to stay with the wreck.”

“Greedy swine! So, on the death of your captain you came into command of all who were not killed? You then are also a British officer?”

“I am not. I am an American.”

A gleam shot athwart Mahomet Sous’ swart face. “An American in British service?” he asked.

“No, an American in the naval service of the United States.”

A sneer appeared on the thin lips of the Turk.

“I was a prisoner on the brig when it was captured and ordered to Malta by a British cruiser, and I now demand that we be allowed to continue our voyage without further delay.”

An ugly look glittered in the eyes of Mahomet Sous, and he appeared about to make an ugly reply to these bold words; but restraining himself with a visible effort he said calmly:—

“It is not always wise to make demands, but in this case yours shall be granted, and you shall be allowed to continue your voyage. But Malta lies at a great distance, and to sail so far in so small a boat would endanger your lives. I, then, for the sake of my friendship with all Christian people, will carry you in my ship; at the same time there is no room

for the boat, which must be left behind. Speak, then, to your men, and let them hand up everything that is in it. After that they, too, may come on board in peace."

"Do you mean," asked Billy, doubtfully, "that you will carry us to Malta and land us there in safety?"

"What I have said I have said," replied Mahomet Sous, gravely, "and by the beard of the Prophet, I swear to perform what I have promised. Hasten then, for we are losing time."

So Billy, still suspicious of the Turk's sincerity, but not knowing what else to do, leaned over the rail and spoke to his companions. He told them that the captain of the felucca had consented to carry them to Malta, where he doubtless expected to be well paid by the British authorities for so doing. He could not take their boat, which he therefore proposed to turn adrift, but was willing for them to place on board the felucca everything that it contained, and if they would first pass up its contents, they would be allowed to follow them.

"Do you think the old thief will keep his word, Mr. Vance?" asked one of the men.

"He has sworn to do so by the beard of the Prophet, which, I believe, is the most sacred of Mussulman oaths," replied Billy. "At any rate, as we are in no position to resist, we may as well appear to trust him."

With this the shipwrecked men began to strip

their boat of what it contained, and hand everything, including arms, nautical instruments, provisions, and cask of water, up the side of the felucca.

“The oars and sail may as well be saved,” suggested Mahomet Sous, as he stood beside the young American, watching the transfer.

So these things were also passed up, and the boat was empty save for her crew, who waited for a rope to be thrown them.

In the mean time the sails of the felucca were being trimmed, and she was gathering slow headway.

Suddenly Mahomet Sous drew his curved scimitar, and, with a quick blow, severed the rope by which the boat was towing, so that she began to drop astern. For an instant her occupants failed to realize what had happened, and stood gazing dumbly upwards. Then, as the knowledge that they were being helplessly cast adrift without food or water, burst upon them, they began to utter yells and curses of rage, while some even tried to dig their fingers into the sides of the moving vessel as she slipped past.

Billy Vance, horrified by the Turk’s treacherous act, sprang aft with an impulsive but fruitless effort to fling a rope to his recent comrades. Then he darted back and seized a pair of oars, which he proposed to throw overboard, in the hope that the men in the boat might pick them up. In this attempt he

was frustrated by two of the felucca's crew, who at a nod from their captain snatched them from him.

At this the young American, his face white with rage, turned furiously upon Mahomet Sous.

"How dare you do such a thing?" he cried. "Is a Mussulman's oath but an idle breath? Do you not know that the British will make you suffer sweetly for this cowardly act?"

"I dare do anything," replied the Turk, "and an oath by the beard of the Prophet is sacred. In what have I broken my word? Those men are at liberty to continue their voyage. I shall not interfere. They might also have come aboard this ship in peace, had they chosen to do so; but they did not, and I was in a hurry. I could not wait always. I said I would carry *you* in my ship. Am I not doing as I said? As for those British, I have not harmed a hair of their heads, nor taken aught from them. What was in their boat they gave me of their own will, and with their own hands. If they wish it back, they have but to ask, and it is theirs."

"Then I ask, and demand that you give me those oars and the sail," cried Billy.

"You? They are not yours. They belong to the British, while you are an American. From your own lips have I heard it."

"Yes, I am an American, and by Heaven the Americans shall make you pay dearly for this day's work. Even now are American war-ships on their

way to these waters to punish you black pirates for your countless outrages against the weak and helpless. Oh! If I can only live to see them come!"

"You lie, dog of a Christian!" snarled Mahomet Sous. "The Americans have no war-ships, and if they had, they would not know how to use them. They are cowards and slaves, who buy peace with money, but dare not fight for it. The Turk kicks them, and spits upon them, and they only pay him more money for doing it. Bah! Let them send their ships. We will take them and fill them with men. As for you, you unlicked whelp of a dog, a prisoner and a slave you have been, and a slave you shall be to the end of your days. Take him away, for his presence annoys me."

At this the two stalwart sailors who had been standing quietly by sprang forward, and, roughly seizing Billy, dragged him to the main hatch where they bundled him into the hold. There they clapped him into irons, chained him to a stout stanchion, and left him to his own melancholy thoughts.

Of all the misfortunes that had overtaken our young midshipman since setting forth from Philadelphia to enjoy his first leave of absence, this seemed the greatest. He did not so much mind being a prisoner, for he had become used to that; but to be the slave of a Barbary corsair was a condition to which the poor lad looked forward with horror. He did not know to which of the pirate states his

present captors belonged, and so had no idea whether he was being carried to Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, or Morocco. It did not make any difference, though, since one of them was doubtless as bad as another.

Yes it did. Was it not Tripoli of which the English officer had spoken as Hal Blount's dinner? To be sure it was; and if Ruth Dean were indeed a captive among the African pirates, it was in Tripoli that she would be found. Therefore he hoped he was being carried toward that city, rather than to any other African port.

He tried to gain some information on the subject from the surly guard, who twice a day brought the portion of sour black bread that formed his sole food while on board the felucca, but could not induce him to utter a word.

So, for three days and nights, he remained in ignorance of his destination, utterly devoid of employment for his time, and without hearing the sound of a voice. The third weary day was dragging toward its close, when, to his unutterable relief, he became aware that the motion of the vessel had ceased, and a minute later he heard the unmistakable sounds of anchoring. His melancholy voyage had at length ended, and now something must happen. For an hour longer he waited in anxious expectancy. Then his guard came, released him from his shackles, and led him on deck.

Although the sun was setting, its light was still so

great that the prisoner's unaccustomed eyes could not bear it for several minutes. When at length he could venture to use them, he found that the felucca was anchored in the capacious harbor of a large and strongly fortified city. Many other vessels lay close at hand, small boats sped in every direction over the dimpled waters, shrill cries in a strange tongue filled the air, and beyond the white walls of the city, stretching as far as the eye could reach, were groves of palms, olives, lemons, and oranges. Close at hand stood Mahomet Sous curiously regarding his prisoner.

"Well, slave," he said at length, "is the sight of Tripoli pleasing, or does its warlike aspect cause thy coward Christian heart to tremble?"

CHAPTER XXI

“EAT, SLAVE, AND AMUSE THE LADIES”

So it was Tripoli, after all, to which our hero's strange adventures had led him. Certainly no place on earth had been farther from his thoughts, when he started on the eventful journey that here found its end. He had striven with all his might to go in an opposite direction; but an irresistible chain of circumstances had forced him onwards until he had at length reached the chief stronghold of the Barbary pirates. Was it blind fate or an over-ruling Providence that had brought him, in spite of his struggles, and against his will, to this place?

Was Ruth Dean imprisoned behind those grim walls, and had he been sent to her rescue? It seemed incredible that the girl who had so recently been his playmate and friend thousands of miles away could now be in Tripoli. Yet such a thing was possible, and the lad gazed curiously at the strange details of minaret and terrace, mosque and dome, the massive walls of the Bashaw's castle, and the close-huddled, flat-topped houses, as though in hope of locating the object of his thoughts.

But even though Ruth should be there and in

direst distress, what could he do to aid her? Was any one in all the world more helpless than he at that moment? He did not believe so; and, filled with despair at the hopelessness of his situation, the lad heaved a deep sigh.

These unhappy meditations, occupying but a few seconds of time, were rudely interrupted by a stinging blow in the face, and the harsh voice of Mahomet Sous exclaiming:—

"Answer, slave, when your master questions. What think you of Tripoli?"

Smarting under the insult of the blow, Billy answered boldly: "It looks to me like a city of cowards, who would dare to fight only behind stout walls."

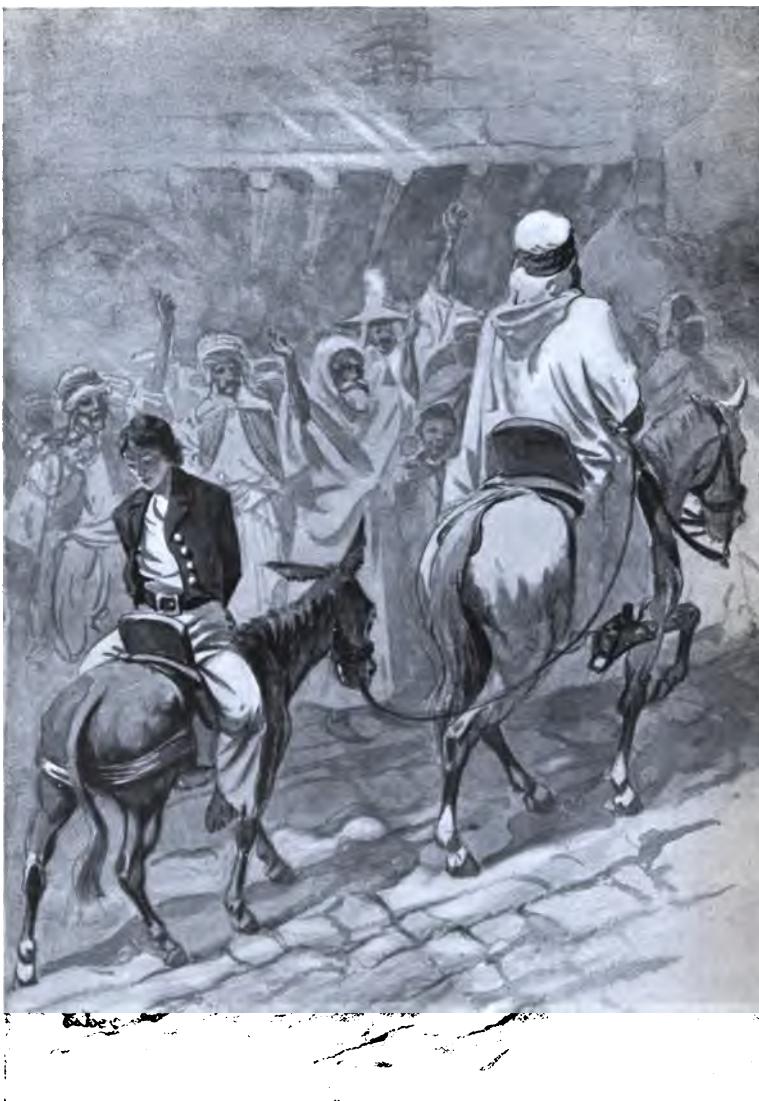
"Son of a race of slaves, it is evident that you know well the nature of cowards," retorted the Turk, angrily; "but let your grovelling countrymen dare show themselves in these waters, and it will be quickly proved who are the cowards. Why, you beardless dog of an infidel, know you not that any one of yonder batteries could blow your entire navy from the water? Also, with this ship alone, I would gladly undertake to capture the heaviest frigate in the world, if she were manned only by Americans. But, alas! They will never fight so long as they can save their skins by the payment of money."

After this outbreak, Mahomet Sous descended into a small boat, which Billy was compelled to aid in

rowing ashore. At the landing a retinue of slaves surrounding a splendidly caparisoned horse, and a wretched-looking donkey, having neither saddle nor bridle, awaited them. There was also a throng of spectators. The slaves prostrated themselves before their master and uttered cries of welcome in which the populace joined. Then the corsair captain mounted his horse, while Billy was made to sit astride the donkey, with his face to its tail, and the triumphal procession began to thread the narrow streets of the city.

Two soldiers, armed with sticks, led the way, and beat aside the people, shouting: "Make way for Mahomet Sous! Make way for the great captain! Look well upon him, and upon his American slave, sole survivor of a mighty war-ship recently destroyed by his Highness. Make way! Make way!"

A black slave led the donkey on which poor Billy was seated, and another, who beat the beast unmercifully, brought up the rear. The Tripolitans, greeting their sea hero with shouts of joy, willingly made way for him to pass; but they crowded close about the captive who followed, jeering at him, heaping curses on his head, pelting him with mud, throwing dust in his face, spitting at him, and inflicting every other indignity within their power. They would gladly have killed him by tearing him, limb from limb, had they been allowed to do so; and as the young American gazed at the frantic throng leaping



BILLY WAS MADE TO SIT ASTRIDE THE DONKEY, WITH HIS FACE
TO ITS TAIL.

and howling about him, he fully believed that his last hour had come. But he passed the trying ordeal in safety, and finally found himself in an open courtyard enclosed on three sides by the low shed-like buildings in which Mahomet Sous kept his slaves and horses, together with stores of grain and a vast amount of miscellaneous plunder taken from captured vessels. The third side of the square was bounded by the rear wall of the dwelling in which were a number of narrow slits that served as windows.

Here our forlorn lad was for a time left to his own devices. The place was filled with slaves, some of whom were cooking over small open fires, while others were caring for the animals whose quarters they shared, but all were talking and laughing. At first they gazed curiously at the newcomer and commented freely on his appearance, but after awhile he ceased to attract attention so long as he remained quiet. If he so much as raised a hand, however, all eyes were instantly turned upon him and his every movement was keenly noted. Discovering this, Billy sat for nearly an hour almost motionless, a pathetic picture of friendless misery.

He ached all over, his clothing and person were filthy, he was hungry and thirsty, and above all he was so sick at heart that it seemed of little consequence whether he lived or died.

While matters stood thus, an important-looking

personage, bearing a short-handled whip of leathern thongs and a bunch of keys, entered the enclosure. At his appearance a silence fell upon its occupants, and every eye watched him furtively, for he was the chief slave-driver, and the person above all others who could make the lives of the wretched beings under his control bearable or miserable.

Looking about him inquiringly, this man uttered a few words, and instantly a score of eager fingers pointed to where Billy sat. Approaching our lad, the slave-driver made a sign for him to follow, and led the way to a door, which he unlocked. Certain of the slaves brought torches, while others filled a stone trough with water from great earthen jars.

The room disclosed by the open door was filled with unsalable plunder, among which was a quantity of clothing belonging to many nationalities. As Billy gazed curiously about the interior, he detected amid the confused accumulation a small box that he took to be a ship's medicine chest. But he was allowed scant time for observation before the slave-driver, measuring him with his eye, selected several articles of clothing from the stock on hand, tossed them to the lad, and again led him outside. At the stone trough the former motioned him to discard his filthy rags, cleanse himself, and assume the garments just given him, all of which the young American was most willing to do.

When he was again dressed, Billy would have

given much for a mirror in which to study the effect of his new costume, since he now wore a white shirt, a scarlet jacket embroidered with gold threads, and a pair of blue, very baggy, Turkish trousers that came only to his knees. His legs were bare, but his feet were protected by heelless boots of yellow leather, while his head was covered by a fez. A caftan or wide strip of snowy muslin that should have hung from his shoulders in graceful folds was also given him. This he attempted so awkwardly to arrange, that the slave-driver snatched it impatiently away, and he was compelled to do without it, to his regret, for it would have concealed much of his ridiculous costume.

Of his old life nothing now remained to our lad, but the half of an American dollar, that was still suspended from his neck by a ribbon, his highly prized commission, now crumpled and defaced by repeated soakings, and a bit of lead pencil. These last two he had furtively withdrawn from a pocket of his cast-off garments, and thrust into the bosom of his shirt.

Now, preceded by the slave-driver and guarded by two other black men, Billy was conducted through a long corridor that ended in an open court, paved in mosaic and surrounded by horseshoe arches supporting a latticed gallery. From each of the arches depended a great Moorish lantern, while in the centre of the court a fountain rose and fell with musical splashings.

At one side of this open-air apartment Mahomet Sous half sat, half reclined, on a rug and a pile of cushions. He was clad in snowy white, wore a huge turban, and was smoking a Turkish water-pipe loaded with perfumed tobacco. The great man had evidently just finished his evening meal, from which a group of slaves were removing what was left.

A slender youth having a delicate olive complexion and wearing a rose-colored caftan stood beside his master, with a cup of tea borne on a small lacquered tray, as Billy appeared between his two conductors. At a point directly in front of Mahomet Sous these, together with the slave-driver, made humble and profound salaams, but the young American stood erect. At sight of him in this position the old sea-wolf sprang to his feet, roaring :—

“ Prostrate thyself, dog of a Christian ! ”

By this sudden movement his shoulder came into contact with the tray borne by the young slave, and its scalding contents were flung over his neck. With a howl of pain and rage, he felled the unhappy youth to the floor, at the same time issuing an order that he instantly be given the bastinado to cure him of his carelessness.

So the trembling wretch, begging for mercy, was dragged away. A fresh *caic* was brought for Mahomet Sous, his soiled one was deftly removed, and he was supplied with another cup of tea. With peace thus restored, he again returned to his cushions,

and resumed the amber mouthpiece of his pipe. In the mean time Billy had seated himself on the pavement, in an attitude similar to that assumed by others who were in attendance, but not on active duty.

Now he became aware of subdued laughter, a great whispering, and a swish of trailing robes, all of which came from the latticed gallery over him, and guessed that he was providing an entertainment for the ladies of this Tripolitan household. He looked up, but could see nothing, though a sudden interruption of the whispering told him that his action was noticed.

After a few minutes of this embarrassing situation, a black girl appeared on the scene, advanced timidly to Mahomet Sous, uttered a few words in a low tone, and vanished.

The Turk, with an upward glance, gave an order, which was obeyed by a slave, who left the room and soon returned bearing a tray heaped with food. This he set down beside Billy.

"Eat," commanded Mahomet Sous, and our lad was hungry enough to accept the ungracious invitation, which had only been given that he might afford further amusement to the invisible spectators in the gallery. Unprovided with a utensil of any sort, he was obliged to explore the dish with his fingers. Nor had he an idea of what he was eating. Whatever it was, it seemed to be flavored with cosmetics; but he was too ravenous to mind a little thing like that, and

so ate heartily, to the great delight of the ladies, as evidenced by titters of laughter.

With this performance the show concluded, and Billy was again conducted to the slave yard, where he was left to find such sleeping-quarters as he could.

CHAPTER XXII

BILLY MINISTERS TO HIS FELLOW-SLAVES

AFTER our hero had served as a show for the entertainment of his master's harem, he wandered for some time about the slave yard, wondering how he should bestow himself for the night. The whole place was indescribably filthy; and, as seen by the moonlight, every spot in it available for sleeping purposes seemed to be already occupied by man or beast. Several of the former, over whom he inadvertently stumbled, called down on him such bitter curses for having awakened them, that he concluded not to take a sleeping-berth in their vicinity, at any rate.

Finally, as a last resort, he began to try the doors giving upon the yard, with the hope of obtaining an entrance into some storeroom, where he might rest his weary body. After several failures, his efforts in this direction were crowned with success, and a door opened to him. As he stepped cautiously inside, a ray of moonlight disclosed this to be the very place in which he had recently been outfitted with clothing. At the same moment he was startled by a groan that came from the floor close at hand.

A slight investigation discovered its author to be the young slave who had been so unfortunate as to spill scalding tea over Mahomet Sous, and had been sentenced to the torture of the bastinado in consequence. He had evidently fainted under the awful punishment, and then been thrown into this place to recover or die, as the case might be. Billy proved his identity by pulling the senseless form slightly forward into the moonlight, which also disclosed the sufferer's condition. The soles of his feet, to which the cruel sticks had been applied, were bruised to a pulp, while his legs, purple with congested blood, were enormously puffed and swollen.

Filled with rage and pity, Billy went first for water, and brought back a jar that was still half full of the precious fluid. With this he bathed the sufferer's fevered brow, until the closed eyes opened, and, with a sigh, the youth struggled back to a consciousness of life and its torments. He was so parched with thirst that he drank eagerly all the water Billy would allow him, and then the latter began to dress his wounds, swathing the injured limbs with cool, wet cloths. Also, bethinking himself of the ship's medicine chest that he had noticed during his previous visit to the storeroom, he searched until he found it. Fortunately, it was open, its lock having been smashed by the pirates who had stolen it, in the hope of discovering something of value. Then it had been thrown aside as worthless, with its contents but

little injured. So, when Billy set it in the moonlight, he discovered, to his great joy, that it was well stocked with powerful remedies, most of which he recognized from having seen them used in the Philadelphia hospital. Among other things, he found a jar of salve; that was the very thing he wanted in the present emergency. Making use of this, and tearing a shirt into strips, he soon had his patient's feet enveloped in soothing bandages.

After that he pulled down a quantity of what might be called "international clothing," since it represented the costumes of nearly every nation of Europe, and made a bed, to which he lifted the victim of Mahomet Sous' cruelty. The latter was filled with a wonderful gratitude that any human being should be so kind to him, and catching hold of Billy's hand, he made a feeble attempt to kiss it, though this our lad would not allow.

"It's all right," he said, "Muley or Hassan, or whatever your name is, and you may say 'thank you' as much as you please, though it was through me, after all, that you got into that beastly scrape; but, in my country, we are not much used to hand kissing. Now, what you'd best do is lie perfectly still, and go to sleep.

"Can't go to sleep, eh? Too much pain?" he added, a little later, as he noted his patient's restless movements and wide-open eyes. "Well, I don't blame you. Wish I had a little morphine, though.

Hold on! I smelled laudanum in one of those bottles, and a few drops of it on a wet rag will go a long way toward quieting you, if I can only get you to take it."

In this he had no trouble, for he had already inspired the youth with such confidence, that the latter was willing to take anything he offered. So, after a little, Billy had the satisfaction of seeing the patient thus strangely thrust upon his care fall into a deep slumber. Then, thoroughly worn out, he flung himself on the bare floor, and, in another moment, had also fallen into a dreamless sleep.

From this he was rudely awakened, some hours later, by a stinging blow on his bare legs, and sprang to his feet, quivering with rage. It was daylight. The big slave-driver stood beside him, with a grin on his black face, and holding in one hand the whip of leathern thongs, which was at once his badge of authority and the instrument through which he made his wishes known. Behind him, in the doorway, and regarding the scene with interest, stood Mahomet Sous.

"Is this fellow at liberty to beat me whenever he feels like so doing?" asked Billy, impetuously, of the latter.

"Certainly. Why not? He has charge of my slaves," was the cool answer.

The young American was staggered and, for a moment, knew neither what to do nor say. He was

at the mercy of these men, who could do with him as they pleased without present fear of consequences. To resist them would be as useless as to utter threats. It was evident that he must submit to their will with the best grace possible and bide his time. At that moment his sister Emily's words regarding "patience" flashed into his mind. Yes, he would be patient until the American fleet appeared off the city, and then would come his turn. Thus thinking, he merely said:—

"Very well; I only wanted to know if he acted by authority. But remember, Mahomet Sous, that the American ships are on their way, and when they come, you will be made to pay dearly for every blow given to an American by your order. Now, what do you want of me?"

"I tell you that your boasted ships will be blown from the water if they dare appear in these parts," retorted the Turk, scornfully. "I alone in the felucca *Tripoli* will undertake to destroy them all."

"I only hope you may meet them, or any one of them, even the smallest and weakest," remarked Billy, in a low tone.

Without paying attention to these words the other continued: "How came you in this place?"

"As you gave me no sleeping-quarters, and this door was open, I simply walked in."

"And what have you to do with this slave?"

"Nothing; except to care for him, as I would for

any other victim of your brutality, if I was given the chance."

"Have you a knowledge of the things contained in that box?"

"I have."

"Are you then one possessed of the art of healing — what you infidels call a physician?"

"Yes."

Although this was a stretching of the truth, Billy did not hesitate to do so under the circumstances, since he readily foresaw the advantage to be gained by being considered a doctor among a people who knew nothing of medicine.

Mahomet Sous gazed meditatively at his newly acquired slave for several minutes. Then he remarked: "It is well that I have learned this thing, since it doubles your value, and enables me to increase the price of your ransom to twenty thousand piastres."

"It may be paid as well as half that sum," suggested Billy, ironically.

"In that case I may still raise the price," said Mahomet Sous, his little eyes glittering with avarice.

"I would," repeated Billy; "for I can assure you that I am a very valuable piece of property, not to be parted with in a hurry, and well worth the best of treatment while retained."

The Turk looked at our lad a little doubtfully as though entertaining a suspicion that his words might

contain some hidden meaning. At the same time he cautioned the slave-driver in his own language not to be unduly harsh in his treatment of the young American. Then, to the latter he said:—

“It is well, and at thirty thousand of American dollars is thy ransom fixed. Until it is paid you shall work with the other slaves, only differing from them in being allowed to retain this dwelling-place if you will in return promise to heal all whom I may send for that purpose.”

“I will do nothing of the kind,” replied Billy; “for there are many cases beyond all healing, and others whose nature may not be understood by the most skilful of physicians. I can only promise to do my best with such cases as come within my knowledge. Also I must have for them as well as for myself good food and plenty of it.”

To this proposition Mahomet Sous finally agreed; for he was keenly alive to the advantage of having on the premises a physician bound to keep his human property in good condition without cost. At the same time he could allow himself a greater latitude in the matter of punishments, and gratify, as never before, his passion for cruelty, since his victims might be restored to usefulness by this infidel repairer of injured bodies.

Thus it happened that at the very outset of his career as a slave, Billy Vance won a place of trust and dignity in his master’s household. To be sure,

he was driven to daily toil with the other slaves, and made to perform a thousand menial tasks; while his services as physician were in constant demand during the hours allowed for rest and thieving. The custom of compelling slaves to steal their livelihood obtained in all the Barbary States at that time, and for this purpose they were given the two hours of each day immediately preceding sunset, after which they were compelled to be within their master's premises. From this precarious method of satisfying his necessities Billy was happily relieved by the promise gained from Mahomet Sous, that he and his patients should be supplied with food.

In a very short time after he had entered upon this strange life his narrow quarters often resembled both dispensary and hospital, so many patients were presented at its door for treatment.

It made his heart ache to witness the misery and amount of useless suffering inflicted upon the poor creatures who flocked to him. Some were diseased, and others sick; but the majority bore the terrible marks of the bastinado or of wounds inflicted by their masters in moments of unbridled passion.

Not only were the slaves of the immediate household sent to him for treatment, but others, from whose masters Mahomet Sous demanded and received pay, until the fame of the young American was spread throughout the city. Finally it reached even to the ears of the Bashaw himself, and— But that is a story that must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII

SIDI, THE SON OF MOUSSA

THE young slave suffering from the effects of the cruel bastinado, who had been Billy's first patient, was a slight and delicate youth of about his own age. He had been reared as a house servant, in which capacity he had attained a deftness that combined with his intelligence and good looks to gain him many privileges. Thus he had excited the jealousy of such of his associates as were forced to labor out of doors, and these, openly rejoicing in his downfall, gave him a jeering welcome to their ranks; for in the establishment of Mahomet Sous one who had received the bastinado was never again allowed to serve within the house.

So it happened that even before the youth recovered from his injuries he was driven forth to out-of-door tasks far beyond his strength. In the mean time Billy Vance had cared for his wounds, shared with him both lodging and food, and was rapidly learning from him the language of the country. He had also conceived a decided liking for the otherwise friendless youth, whose name was Sidi ben Moussa, or Sidi, son of Moses.

When, therefore, he found the latter working in the same gang with himself at carrying baskets of earth for a new water battery, he at once assumed half of Sidi's burdens in addition to his own, and tried in every way to shield him from the deadly effect of the unaccustomed toil. In this he only partially succeeded; for, toward the close of the weary day, the youth, tottering by his side with drawn face and trembling limbs, uttered a moan of exhaustion, and sank limply to the ground. As he did so, the slave-driver, who had been watching him for several minutes, sprang forward with uplifted whip.

Ere he could strike, Billy Vance seized his arm, and, looking him full in the face, said slowly:—

“He is under my care. I am responsible to our master for his life. If you smite him, he will die, and at that moment I will strike thee blind. Therefore, son of an ass, withhold thy hand; for the powers of Solomon are mine, and I will surely do as I have said.”

Billy's Arabic was not yet fluent; but it was understood by the superstitious black man, who quailed before his steady gaze, trembled at his threat, and after a moment of hesitation walked away.

Then Billy helped his friend to a seat in the shade of a pile of rocks, bade him remain there until the hour for quitting work, resumed his own task as though nothing had happened, and the incident was closed. Its effect was, however, apparent from that

time forth in the altered demeanor of the taskmaster, and in the vastly increased respect accorded our lad by his fellow-slaves. The former no longer imposed impossible tasks upon Sidi ; or if he did, Billy promptly lightened them, and the overseer dared not remonstrate.

Thus Sidi's life grew to be bearable, while his admiration for his protector became unbounded. In the hours when they were not engaged with out-of-door tasks, he spent every waking moment in devising something for the young American's comfort or happiness. He took charge of all their slender domestic arrangements, cooked, washed, mended, and even stole, right and left, such things as he fancied might prove acceptable to his friend. Above all, he never tired of repeating, over and over, words of the language that Billy was striving so earnestly to master. He also gladly assisted the latter in ministering to the sick, until he became very deft at the tying of bandages, the cleansing of wounds, the preparing of salves, and the mixing of soothing lotions.

One evening, after Billy had been for several months a resident of Tripoli, Sidi made a confession, and gave his friend a bit of his own history. The former had noticed that, in passing certain places, his companion removed his slippers and walked barefooted. Finally, he asked the reason for this, whereupon Sidi answered :—

“ Because I am that which I have feared to tell

thee, and for which you will despise me when it shall come to thy knowledge."

"What sort of a monster are you, then?" asked Billy, curiously.

"I am the son of a Jew," replied the other, in faltering tone, and with a downcast face.

"Is that all?"

"Is it not enough to be of a people despised of all men, cursed by all, and even killed without fear of evil consequence? Is it not enough to belong to the outcasts of the world?"

"Not of the world," rejoined Billy, quickly; "for, in many countries, a Jew is granted all the privileges that are given to others. In my own land, for instance, where all religions are freely enjoyed, he lives on an equality with all men."

"It passes belief!" exclaimed Sidi, his dark eyes kindling at the thought. "I knew not that Jews dwelt in your country; but surely those who do so are taxed more heavily than others?"

"Not a single piastre."

"May they wear their slippers when passing a mosque?"

"Certainly, if they choose to do so."

"Are they allowed to leave their own quarter after the going down of the sun?"

"They are not compelled to live in any especial quarter, but dwell where they please, and are free to come and go at all hours of the night as well as of the day."

“How, then, have they obtained these unheard-of privileges? Is it by the giving of rich gifts to the cadis and other rulers?”

“No,” laughed Billy. “There is no giving of gifts nor bribery of any kind that I know of, and the Jews of America have no privileges that are not also freely given to all who dwell in that land.”

“Praise be to Jehovah that there is such a place in the world!” ejaculated Sidi, fervently, and with tears standing in his eyes. “Fortunate am I to have heard of it, and from this moment the dearest wish of my life shall be to sometime kiss the soil of that thrice-blessed land.”

“That is also my dearest wish, just at present,” said Billy, soberly, “and I believe I would be willing to kiss the very dirt of the streets if I could only find myself in an American town once more.”

“And you do not despise nor hate me because I am of the accursed people?” persisted Sidi, anxiously.

“Of course not. On the contrary, I like you very much, and am glad to have your friendship. But how comes it that you happen to be a slave? Were you captured at sea, or shipwrecked?”

“No, I have never been from this city, where my parents still dwell. But it so happened that when I was a child my father became indebted to Mahomet Sous. The sum was small, but the head of my father was threatened if he did not pay, and at that time he was poor. Not that he is other than poor now,”

added Sidi, hastily, at the same time casting a furtive glance about him to make sure that no one was listening.

“What had all that to do with you?” asked Billy.

“Only that I was accepted in payment of the debt.”

“Do you mean that you were sold into slavery by your own parents?”

“It was to save my father’s life, and there was no other way. Often since that time has he tried to buy me back,—offering many times my value as a slave,—but Mahomet Sous refuses to let me go.”

“What is your father’s business?”

“He is a worker in silver.”

“Does he live in the Mella?”

“Of a certainty, since he is a Jew, and Jews may only dwell in that quarter of the city.”

“It is a place I have never visited, and am curious to see. Could you not take me sometime to your father’s house?”

Sidi’s face became radiant at this proposition. “Gladly will I do so,” he exclaimed. “I have told my people of you, and they wish much to see you, but I dared not hope for the honor of a visit. Now, if you will really go, I will notify them, and a day shall be named. We will make the visit during the hours of stealing.”

“Couldn’t we go after dark?” asked Billy, who had a wholesome dread of traversing the city streets by daylight.

"No, for the gate of the Mella is then closed, so that none may enter or leave. Also, if we were absent from this place after dark the bastinado would await our return."

"All right," said Billy; "you know best, so arrange the trip to suit yourself."

They would hardly have dared even plan such a visit as the one under discussion had Mahomet Sous been at home; but he was not, having gone to sea on one of his piratical cruises several weeks before. Thus the discipline of his household was much relaxed, and the slaves enjoyed a greater latitude than when his eye was upon them.

So it happened that on one hot August day, shortly after the foregoing conversation, while Billy and the young Jew were toiling side by side at the hateful task of repairing a fortification that overlooked the sea, the latter announced that, if it were agreeable to his friend, their proposed visit to the Mella might be made that evening.

"Very good," replied the American lad, who was gazing longingly out over the blue waters of the bay at that moment; "I'm with you, but I must say I wish we were going to sea instead of plunging deeper into this filthy city. How delightfully cool it must be out there. See that queer old craft just off the mouth of the harbor — looks like a wreck under a jury mast; and, by Jove! I believe it is one. Wonder —"

Here conversation was suspended by the unwell-

come approach of an overseer, who, with snapping whip, was hurrying the weary task, that it might be completed before Mahomet Sous returned from his voyage.

“Hasten, slaves! Hasten the work, that your master may be satisfied when he sees it,” cried the driver. “At any hour he may come, and if what has been done during his absence meets not with his approval, then not even the mercy of the Prophet may save your backs.”

“He means that a general flogging will be the order of the day,” said Billy; “and I shall have a lot of damaged slaves on my hands.”

“Silence!” thundered the overseer. “Work more and talk less, Christian dog, or the lash may not be withheld from thee.”

So Billy held his tongue and toiled on as best he could through the suffocating heat, only pausing for an occasional glance at the strange craft that was entering the harbor. So slowly did she move, that at the hour of quitting work she had not yet reached an anchorage. He would have lingered longer had it been permitted to do so; but as no slaves might be on the fortifications except to labor, he reluctantly took his departure in company with Sidi; and the two bent their steps toward the Mella, or Jews’ quarter of the city.

CHAPTER XXIV

A VISIT TO THE MELLA

ALTHOUGH by this time there was nothing in our young American's costume to distinguish him from the other slaves of Tripoli, the fact that he was white could not be disguised, and the novel sight of a Christian walking with a Jew through a Mohammedan city attracted general attention. So as the two lads hastened through the crooked alleys that were called streets, and which were everywhere deep in garbage and other filth thrown from the houses, they were reviled and pelted. Yelling children, naked or nearly so, dogged their steps and subjected them to innumerable petty annoyances, veiled women cursed them from open doorways, while such men as they encountered, gravely spat upon them. It was an exasperating experience, and to go through it without turning upon his persecutors required all the self-restraint that Billy Vance could command.

Had it not been for Sidi he would probably have got into serious trouble; but the young man hurried him onward, begging him to take no notice of the insults heaped upon them, and finally they reached the gate of the Mella in safety, though Billy was

by this time boiling over with wrath. The instant they entered the Jewish quarter all persecution ceased, for even the Mohammedan children dared not venture within its precincts.

Now every one whom they met greeted them with kindly courtesy. All the men and boys wore long gaberdines, resembling bath-robes or dressing-gowns, girdled about the waist, black skull-caps, and heel-less slippers; while the women and girls, all of whom appeared with uncovered faces, were dressed in bright colors, and smiled pleasantly on the young men. At the same time the filth with which the streets were choked, was so much worse than in other parts of the city, that Billy felt as though he were walking through a pigsty, and was often obliged to hold his nose against the horrible odors rising from it. The houses, too, were meaner and poorer than any he had previously seen.

After awhile his guide paused before the very poorest looking of them all, and bade him enter the dwelling of Moussa, the silversmith. A dark, reeking passage, a squalid court, and several small rooms devoid of furniture, but neatly whitewashed, were traversed. Then Sidi rapped in a peculiar manner on a part of the wall that apparently differed in no way from the rest. In a moment a small portion of it swung back as though on hinges, disclosing a narrow opening in which stood an old man, evidently a servant. At sight of Sidi he made an obeisance, exclaiming, "Peace be with you!"

"May the peace of God rest upon this house," answered the young Jew, as he led his friend through the opening. Billy rubbed his eyes, and gazed about him with amazement, for he seemed to be in fairy-land. He stood in a small court even more beautiful than that of Mahomet Sous, filled with rich hangings, flowers, singing birds, and running waters. Sidi smiled as he noted the effect of these surroundings upon his companion; but without pausing for comment conducted him to a room, where was prepared a perfumed bath, and in which a servant awaited with fine linen garments.

After Billy, still bewildered by what he saw, had bathed, and been clothed in flowing robes of spotless white, he again sought the court, where he now found a group of persons awaiting his coming. Among them was Sidi, arrayed like a young prince, a venerable old man with white beard, two women in silks and jewels, one of whom was a strikingly handsome girl, and several children.

To our lad's dismay all these persons prostrated themselves upon his appearance as though they were slaves in presence of a powerful master. He made haste to bid them rise, and was then presented in due form to Sidi's father, mother, and sister, who not only bade him welcome to the house of Moussa, but assured him that they held his visit to be the greatest honor it had ever received.

After a little all seated themselves on cushions,

each before a tiny table of inlaid work, not more than a foot in height, while attendants began to serve, in dishes of silver and daintiest china, the several courses of a well-prepared meal. As it progressed, Billy discovered that, by the entire family, he was considered to have saved the life of their dearly beloved Sidi, and that in consequence their own lives and fortunes were at his disposal. He also learned that Sidi's beautiful sister Berith was so skilled in the art of embroidery, that she was frequently bidden to the Bashaw's palace to instruct the ladies of his harem in her specialty.

Here was indeed food for thought. In all the time that he had spent in Tripoli, our lad had not been able to gain a clue regarding the supposed American girl, whom he had heard was held prisoner by the Bashaw, and whose name was Ruth. Now a way of learning something about her was unexpectedly opened to him, and he began to ask questions.

Yes, Berith did know of a slave girl in the palace who was certainly white; but, as to her name, nationality, or previous history, she could tell nothing. It was possible, though, that she might find an opportunity of communicating with her. If the saviour of Sidi wished, she would make every effort to do so, and would, through her brother, let him know the result.

He did most earnestly wish her to do so, and—here Billy produced the half of an American dollar that had hung from his neck—if she were indeed

an American, Berith was to show her this token. Should she prove to be his friend, she would recognize it and send him some message.

By the time this arrangement was perfected, the dinner was also concluded, and the hour for departure had come, if the young men would escape from the Mella before the closing of its gate. With great disgust, but as a matter of precaution, they resumed their slave's dress, and bidding adieu to their kindly entertainers, again set forth. Billy had a nervous dread of the city streets through which they must retrace their way; but, to his relief as well as surprise, found them almost deserted. As he and Sidi speculated concerning this state of affairs, they came suddenly upon a great concourse of people who were watching in breathless silence one of the strangest processions ever seen in Tripoli.

It consisted of some fifty or sixty dejected-looking men, all evidently native sailors, many of whom bore traces of recent wounds. These were guarded by a strong body of soldiers, and at their head rode a man loaded with chains, and mounted on an ass. Billy would have avoided this crowd if possible, and was about to turn away, when, with a cry of amazement, his companion directed his attention to the leader of the wretched company.

“It is our master, Mahomet Sous!” he exclaimed.
“Do you not recognize him?”

“Impossible!” rejoined the young American.

And then to make sure, the two pressed eagerly forward for a closer view.

It was indeed the fierce old pirate who had long been noted throughout that part of the world for bravery and cruelty ; and though Billy could not at that time discover how he came to occupy his present unhappy position, he afterwards learned the story.

While cruising in search of plunder, Mahomet Sous in his great war-felucca *Tripoli*, carrying fourteen guns, had fallen in with Captain Andrew Sterrett, in the twelve-gun United States schooner *Enterprise*, and a fierce engagement between the two was immediately begun.

It lasted three hours, during which time the Turks twice surrendered and hauled down their flag ; but each time when a boat was sent to take possession, they again hoisted their colors and renewed the fight. Exasperated by this treachery, Sterrett determined to sink them, and had obtained a raking position for this purpose, when the corsair's flag was again hastily lowered, and Mahomet Sous, bleeding from several wounds, appeared with it at the gangway. Here he flung it into the sea, and bowing his head to the deck, made signs that he had indeed surrendered. Upon this, Lieutenant David Porter was again sent to take possession.

While the *Enterprise* had not lost a man nor received any material damage, in either hull or rigging, the felucca was almost a wreck. Her main-

mast had gone by the board, twenty of her crew had been killed, and besides her commander, twenty-nine more were wounded. After debating what he should do with his prize, Captain Sterrett at length decided to dismantle her and send her to Tripoli, as a warning of the treatment other pirates might expect at the hands of American sailors. So the felucca's guns and ammunition were taken from her, she was stripped of all but a single sail, and ordered to make her way home as best she could.

News of her coming reached the Bashaw a few hours before her arrival in port, and so enraged him that he determined to visit upon her unfortunate crew a terrible punishment. No sooner, therefore, had the crippled felucca dropped anchor than her whole company was seized to be paraded to the castle, where every man of them was to receive the bastinado. Moreover, all the property of Mahomet Sous was declared confiscated, and he was disgraced for life.

It is no wonder, then, that this melancholy procession made a profound impression upon the inhabitants of the city, and so filled them with anger that, when Billy Vance in pushing forward for a better view of his disgraced master, jolted one of the spectators, the man turned on him in a fury. In an instant a fierce tumult was raging; and when the soldiers, rushing to the rescue, found a Christian and a Jew in conflict with a throng of Mohammedans,

they promptly seized the two former and dragged them away to the castle.

The Bashaw of Tripoli, whom Billy had never before seen, was in his council chamber, angrily awaiting the appearance of the grizzled captain, who he considered had shamed him by yielding a Tripolitan ship to the despised Americans. He generally sat in languid state when called upon to administer justice; but now he paced restlessly to and fro before his trembling ministers, no one of whom dared address him. A more unpropitious moment for the introduction of a Christian, charged with the great crime of striking a Mussulman, could hardly be conceived, and yet it was while affairs were in this condition that Billy Vance, with his companion, was ushered into the presence of the irate ruler.

“Whom have we here?” cried the Bashaw, pausing in his walk and glancing at the prisoners.

An officer on bended knees, who kept touching his forehead to the pavement, briefly detailed the circumstances of the arrest.

“A Christian and a Jew, who have dared lift their hands against true believers!” roared the Bashaw. “And slaves of the man who has this day brought shame upon my head! Away with them to the bastinado. Let each be given two hundred blows; and, if they still live, let them be flung without food or water into the lowest dungeon of the castle. By the beard of the Prophet, it is to be seen if I am still a protector of the faithful, or not.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE BASHAW APPOINTS A PHYSICIAN

THE young American grew faint and sick at heart as he heard the terrible sentence just pronounced by the Bashaw; for he knew that it would be carried out to the letter. The two hundred blows would be delivered without mercy, and the last would have all the force of the first. He would die under the punishment, of course, and so need take no thought of the dungeon, with its tortures of thirst and starvation. But, how shameful to be beaten to death like a cur, merely to gratify the whim of one whom he regarded only as a black pirate. Already the soldiers were dragging him away, when, with a sudden fury, he broke from them, and, shaking his clinched fist at the Bashaw, screamed in Arabic:—

“ From the moment thy unjust sentence is carried out, thou shalt be cursed with the curse of Solomon, and thy dearest shall be given over to the foul fiends for torment ! ”

Never in all his life had the tyrant been so defied, and never had his pride received such a shock. He was perplexed and frightened by the bold words of the Christian; for he was intensely superstitious

and an arrant coward. Suddenly it flashed into his mind who this youth was; for he had heard of the slave, belonging to the household of Mahomet Sous, who could perform miracles, the like of which had never been known in Tripoli.

The soldiers had again seized upon Billy and were roughly hustling him from the council chamber, when, in a loud voice, the Bashaw commanded them to halt.

“Is this infidel the slave who heals the sick, causing the blind to see, and the deaf to hear?” he asked.

“He is the one for whom such things are claimed,” replied an officer, cautiously.

“Then let his punishment wait, for I have need of him. Guard him well, but see that he comes to no harm.”

“And the Jew?”

“Away with him to the tormentors.”

“Hold!” cried Billy, boldly. “This Jew is my assistant in the art of healing, and I cannot serve your Highness without his aid.”

For a moment the Bashaw glared at the young American, like a wild beast in danger of losing its prey. Then the approach of Mahomet Sous, together with his sorry company, was heralded; and with an impatient gesture he exclaimed: “Hold them both until I give further orders.”

So Billy and his companion, hardly daring to believe that they were reprieved, were taken to the

guard room, and there held to await the tyrant's pleasure.

"How dared you face him so boldly?" asked Sidi, in a low tone.

"Because he could do no worse to us than he had already ordered, and I thought that perhaps he was, after all, a coward who might be staggered by a show of bravery. I have also discovered that Solomon seems to have taken a pretty strong hold upon these Mussulman chaps."

"It is a powerful name," admitted Sidi. "And one not to be lightly used."

"A sort of trump card, eh? to be held in reserve for emergencies," said Billy, whose spirits had risen wonderfully within the past few minutes.

While the lads were still discussing their situation, they were again summoned to the presence of the Bashaw, who had in the mean time promptly disposed of Mahomet Sous and his unfortunate crew.

Now he questioned Billy sharply as to his medical skill, which the latter gravely assured him was greater than that of any other person to be found in all Tripoli.

"Then shall it be put to the test," said the Bashaw, "and upon it shall depend thy life, together with that of thy companion. Know that a child who is dear to me lies in such condition that the wisest men of the city have declared, within an hour, that he cannot outlive the night. Him will I deliver to thy care,

and if he lives, thou also shalt live ; but if he dies, then shall thy death and that of thy companion follow closely."

Hard as were these conditions, Billy was forced to accept them, and he shortly found himself in the presence of the sick child, who was a boy five or six years old, stricken with a fever. So nearly had it run its course that there was, indeed, little hope of saving the sufferer ; but Billy attacked the case resolutely and worked at it as only one can whose own life is at stake. He first sent Sidi, who went under guard, for the chest of medicines that had already served him so well. Then he devoted himself to reducing the child's temperature and cooling its fevered blood. Hour after hour he worked without rest, and supported only by an occasional hastily snatched mouthful of food. The long night dragged itself slowly away, with the sufferer hovering so close to the borderland that it seemed with each minute as though the fluttering spirit would be released.

It was the Bashaw's favorite son, the one upon whom he had lavished the greater part of his affections, and many times during that anxious night did the proud ruler steal softly into the room to note the progress of Billy's battle with death. He alone was permitted to enter ; but, in an anteroom slaves, ordered to absolute silence, were in attendance ready to procure with all promptness anything that might be wanted. To these Billy's directions were made

known through Sidi, for the lad himself never for a moment left the bedside of his patient.

A silver lamp burning perfumed oil shed a subdued light over the scene, and through open windows the night breeze, scented by countless flowers, blew softly. Every few minutes, Billy touched the dry skin of the child or felt his pulse, but it was not until a flush of light in the east proclaimed the coming of dawn, that the slightest change for the better was apparent.

Then, as the tremulous voice of a Muezzin, uttered in musical tone, from a near-by minaret, the long-drawn call to morning devotions, a bead of moisture stood on the boy's forehead, and Billy, noting it, obeyed the call with a fervent prayer of thankfulness. Within a few minutes the child's body was covered with perspiration, and the young physician knew that through God's mercy both its life and his own were saved.

As he whispered the joyful tidings to Sidi, tears of gratitude streamed down the cheeks of the Jewish lad, and he, too, knelt to the God of his fathers. A few minutes later the Bashaw himself, haggard with his night's vigil, softly entered the chamber, and the great news was imparted to him. His harsh face softened as he bent over the child, now quietly sleeping with regular breathings, and when he arose he clasped the young American's hand with a warm pressure.

The news of this wonderful cure spread quickly through the palace, and from it into the city streets, where in every shop, bazaar, or public place those gathered to hear some new thing, were given an additional topic for discussion. Already was the air filled with marvellous tales of the western fighters who had overcome Mahomet Sous, and now came a story of one of the same race who possessed healing powers greater than those of any Hadji.

By the holy camel! These things were beyond belief, and could be attributed only to sorcery. Of course the infidels were in league with the powers of evil, and must eventually come to grief through the influence of the Prophet; but in the mean time it would be well for all true believers to avoid them as much as possible.

Thus it happened that no Tripolitan sailor could be induced, save by force, to go to sea while there was danger of falling in with American war-ships; and whenever Billy Vance appeared on the streets he was given a wide berth by all who were so unfortunate as to meet him.

At the same time the young American was in high favor with the Bashaw, who not only made him many valuable presents, but installed him at the palace, with Sidi to be his assistant, as physician in charge of the health of its numerous inmates. It was a novel position for a youth of his age and limited experience to occupy, and one to be retained only by coolness and

self-confidence. In trying to fill it, Billy found himself in a most delicate situation, for his knowledge of medicine was so slight that he might at any time make a mistake that would cause him to be disgraced; while the whims of the Bashaw were so capricious that he was constantly degrading old favorites and replacing them with new. Of course these last were regarded with bitter enmity by those whom they had supplanted, and so Billy found himself cordially hated by charlatans, quacks, and alleged healers of every description whose trade was injured by his success and who zealously sought his downfall.

Realizing all this made our lad more than ever anxious for the appearance of the American fleet, and an opportunity of escaping to it. Rumors of its approach had reached the city, and work on the fortifications was being pushed night and day. A blockade of the port had been announced by Commodore Dale, but no steps were taken to enforce it until, at length, toward the close of a day late in August, a tall frigate wearing the stars and stripes appeared in the roads, and from the highest point of the Bashaw's castle Billy Vance gazed with swelling heart and tear-dimmed eyes on the glorious flag of his own country.

A few days later this same frigate, which proved to be the *President*, intercepted a Greek ship that was trying to run the blockade, and took from her thirty-five Tripolitans, who were detained as prisoners of

war. Then word was sent to the Bashaw that these would be released in exchange for an equal number of Americans provided that he held so many captives. If there were not that number in his possession, then the captured Tripolitans would be given in exchange for such Americans as were within his power.

After much haggling and debate, this proposition was accepted, and summoning Billy Vance, the Bashaw informed him that he, together with six other Americans, of whose presence in the city our lad was until that moment unaware, were to be restored to their own people.

To the surprise of all present, Billy, instead of being overjoyed at the prospect thus opened, stood for a moment in silence, and with downcast eyes. Then, addressing the Bashaw, he asked:—

“Who are the others?”

“Six sailors recently wrecked on the coast,” was the answer.

“Are there any women among them?”

“Certainly not,” replied the Bashaw, with an air of surprise.

“And is your Highness so displeased with my efforts at healing, that you are desirous of getting rid of me?”

“On the contrary, I would gladly have thee remain; since never have I been given more faithful service.”

“Then, if I should choose to abide in Tripoli, I might still do so?”

“It might be so arranged.”

“In that case,” said Billy, “send me not away; but let me remain in the service of a master whose kindness has been unceasing since first I came to this place.”

CHAPTER XXVI

A GLIMPSE OF THE HAREM

SURPRISING as the request of our young American, to be allowed to remain in Tripoli rather than return to his own people would seem to most persons, it did not strike the Bashaw or his ministers as at all strange. They said to themselves that he had been long enough in their country to realize its vast superiority over any other, and especially over the barbarous land of his birth. He occupied a position of ease and influence, such as he could not hope to attain elsewhere; and above all, he was admitted to the favor of a powerful ruler. What more could an infidel ask or expect? If he would only renounce his own faith, and become a true believer, he would be certain of honor and riches. It was no wonder, then, that he chose to remain where he was, and his decision to do so showed a wisdom beyond his years. This was the universal verdict, and no one sought for other reasons that might have influenced him.

That there were other reasons no reader of this story can doubt; and the chiefest of them was clasped so tightly in Billy's hand during his interview with the Bashaw, as almost to cut through the

skin. It was only the broken half of a silver coin that he had received from Sidi even as he was summoned to the council chamber, and he had given it but one quick glance. That, however, was enough to change the whole current of his thoughts, and influence all his actions; for that bit of silver was half of an American dollar. At first he imagined it to be the one he had worn so long, and but recently intrusted to Berith; then his heart gave a great throb of joy; for he discerned faintly scratched on its surface the letter "V." It was not his, but its companion piece, that he had given to Ruth Dean, on the day of their parting in the Philadelphia hospital. She was then in Tripoli, an inmate of the Bashaw's palace, alone, friendless, and in danger. She had received his token, knew of his presence near her, and was at that moment relying on him to save her. Knowing all this, could he consent to be exchanged and taken to a place of safety, leaving her in hopeless captivity? No, a thousand times no! Anything rather than to so play the part of a coward.

Animated by this resolve, our lad promptly refused his offered liberty, and begged leave to remain in the service of the Bashaw, at the same time determined to communicate with Ruth as speedily as possible and plan an escape that they should attempt together.

The other and minor reasons for refusing to leave Tripoli were, that he believed he might in some way aid the American cause by remaining, and fear that

harm might come to Sidi, for whom he now entertained a sincere affection, should he abandon him. At the same time he longed with the longing of an intense homesickness to exchange his present surroundings of cruelty, intrigue, ignorance, and suffering for the company of his own people. To once more tread the deck of an American ship, and hear again the sound of his native tongue, seemed at that moment the greatest and most desirable of earthly blessings. For fear lest he should be unable to conceal his real feelings from those who had heard his request, he excused himself, as soon as it was granted, and hastened to his own room, which was in a turret of the castle.

There Sidi awaited him, but could give no information regarding Ruth, except that she had been greatly overcome on receiving his token, and had barely time to give Berith hers in exchange, when the latter was summoned elsewhere. Hastily writing a few lines, with his precious lead pencil, on a scrap of paper, telling Ruth of his determination not to leave Tripoli without her, and asking for any suggestion she might be able to offer as to a plan of escape, Billy bade Sidi carry it at once to Berith, with the request that she would seek an early opportunity of transmitting it to her for whom it was intended.

That Billy and Ruth should be inmates of the same building without a chance of meeting, or even

a knowledge of each other's presence, is not surprising when the conditions surrounding them are remembered. In Tripoli, as in all Mohammedan countries, women are kept strictly secluded, and may only appear in public with their faces covered to the eyes. Living apartments separate from those of the men are provided for them in every house. They may only observe the world from behind screens of lattice, and breathe the outer air on the housetops, which are flat, and surrounded by battlements, concealing them from observation. Above all, they are guarded like prisoners both night and day. Thus, if Billy had not previously been given a hint of Ruth's presence in Tripoli, he might have spent a lifetime in the city without a knowledge that she was in that part of the world.

Having despatched Sidi to the Mella with his note, Billy ascended to the roof of the tall turret in which his room was located, for another look at the proud frigate riding gracefully at anchor in the outer harbor, and beyond range of the batteries. As he fixed his longing gaze on the bit of bright color fluttering at her mizzen-peak, that he knew was the loved flag of his country, his attention was attracted by a murmur of voices and rippling laughter close at hand.

Stepping to one side, and peering cautiously over the battlement, he caught a sight such as, in all probability, no other Christian in Tripoli had ever

looked upon. A score of the Bashaw's wives, attended by female slaves, had sought the highest terrace on their own side of the castle, for a view of the American ship. This roof reached to within ten feet of the platform occupied by Billy ; and there, unconscious of observation, with uncovered faces, the dark-skinned beauties of the harem were laughing and chatting with an animation very foreign to their usual listlessness.

Most of them had their eyes darkened with antimony, cheeks covered with rouge, throats painted white, nails stained with henna, and all were clad in gorgeous costumes of brilliant colors. Their caftans were white, with flowing sleeves, and bound about the waist by silken sashes, crimson, blue, or gold. They also wore exquisitely embroidered velvet jackets, divided skirts gathered at, but falling below, the knees, broad anklets of silver or gold, and yellow slippers embossed with seed pearls. Their flowing tresses of jetty black were entwined with ropes of pearls, and all wore veils of thin stuff, now flung carelessly across their shoulders, but ready to be used as face coverings at a moment's notice.

Each of the attendant slaves, who bore cushions, musical instruments, sherbets, or whatever else might be wanted, was clad in a single white garment girded about the waist. Most of these slaves were black, though among them appeared several of a lighter color. Of them all, however, only one was

white, and to her our lad's attention was instantly drawn. She was a slender girl, little more than a child ; and, as she stood by herself, wistfully gazing at the distant ship, Billy, though he could not clearly distinguish her features, felt convinced that he was looking upon Ruth Dean.

As he reached this conclusion, one of the women spoke so sharply to the girl as to startle her from her reverie, and cause her to turn her face so that Billy could see it plainly. There was no longer a doubt that she whom he had promised to protect from harm stood near him, and within easy reach of his voice ; but at the same time separated from him by a barrier so great as to be well-nigh impassable.

Seized with a desire to attract her attention and notify her of his presence, the lad incautiously raised his head a few inches above the parapet. That he was instantly observed was made evident by a chorus of suppressed screams, that caused him to hastily stoop again behind the sheltering wall. The outbreak of cries was succeeded by an interval of silence so prolonged that he was finally emboldened to take another look. To his intense disappointment the terrace was empty, nor was any vestige of its recent occupants to be seen.

For an hour longer the lad maintained his position, hoping that they might reappear, and that by some means he might communicate with Ruth, even though it were only to exchange glances of mutual recogni-

tion. At the end of that time the terrace was still empty, and he was forced to give over his watching by the coming of Sidi with word that a messenger from the Bashaw waited below. So Billy reluctantly left the lofty outlook and returned to his own apartment, where to his dismay he found a Mollah or Mohammedan priest. This individual had been sent to sound him upon his willingness to relinquish Christianity, and formally embrace the faith of Islam.

The Bashaw had for sometime wished that our young American might do this thing, and so bind himself to remain in Tripoli by ties not easily broken. He had, however, hesitated to propose it, for fear of meeting with such an obstinate refusal as should compel him to relinquish Billy's services. Now that the latter had begged leave to remain where he was, the Bashaw was sanguine that he might also be ready to accept the faith of those among whom he had chosen to dwell, and had sent his favorite Mollah to consult with the lad upon the subject.

Billy had suspected that an effort would be made to convert him, but hoped it would be delayed until he should have found some way of escaping with Ruth from the city. As matters stood, he hated to meet the Mollah ; for, though he had no more intention of embracing the Mohammedan faith than he had of committing suicide, he realized that, in order to gain time for his project, he must express a willingness to listen to all that the priest had to say. He

therefore greeted the latter courteously, declared himself honored by a visit from one so renowned, and, when the subject of religion was introduced, admitted a desire to study that of Islam with a view to comparing it with Christianity.

Pleased and encouraged at finding so docile a pupil where he had expected to meet with decided opposition, the Mollah plunged heartily into his subject, and began to expound the Koran from its very first paragraph. Billy appeared to listen intently to all that he said, but in reality his thoughts were far away. The sight of Ruth on that terrace had suggested a plan of escape for both of them that he could not dismiss from his mind, and the details of which he was anxious to perfect.

Thus, after enduring the Mollah's presence and droning talk until he was nearly wild with impatience, he interrupted him to say that what he had already heard seemed of such importance as to demand time for careful consideration.

Agreeing with this, the Mollah, after expressing a readiness to continue his religious instruction whenever he should be requested to do so, finally took his departure.

"Thank goodness, that business is ended!" exclaimed Billy, with a sigh of relief, as he watched the old man out of sight. "And now for a plan of action."

CHAPTER XXVII

PLANNING AN ESCAPE

BILLY's plan was simple enough in outline, but presented a vast number of difficulties when examined in detail. It was, that taking advantage of some favorable opportunity when an American ship should be off the city, Ruth should again visit the terrace, lying just below the turret platform. From this Billy would lower a rope and draw her up to where he stood, after which they would make their way together out of the castle and to a boat that should be in waiting. To carry out this programme he must first communicate it to Ruth, which he hoped to do through Berith. Then the favorable opportunity must be awaited, and when it came, notice of the exact hour set for her adventure must also be conveyed to the American girl.

Then would come the critical moment in which she must elude those who watched the harem, and were responsible with their lives for the safe-keeping of its inmates. If she succeeded in gaining the terrace and joining Billy on his elevated platform, a disguise must be arranged and some plausible excuse invented for leaving the castle. If all this

could be accomplished, our lad felt little doubt of his ability to provide for the rest of the programme. At the same time, he well knew that if any part of it should fail, the lives of all concerned in the escape, including Ruth's and his own, would be seriously endangered.

Still, if Ruth would consent to make the effort, he was fully determined to attempt it; for he was certain that he would rather die at once than spend the remainder of his days in Tripoli, and equally certain that any fate would be preferable for the American girl to that now threatening her.

Sidi was included in all his plans; for Billy had made up his mind to take the Jewish lad back with him to America if possible. Thus he confided the entire programme of escape to his companion, who at once declared a willingness to assist in carrying it out. As the devoted fellow expressed it, "My life is yours to keep, to take, or to do with as seemeth to you best."

It was a keen disappointment to Billy that their attempt could not be made while the *President* still lay in the harbor; but that frigate took her departure immediately upon the exchange of prisoners being effected, and before he had time to communicate his plan to Ruth. So there was nothing to do but await as patiently as might be another opportunity, and a weary waiting it proved.

Every day, and often several times during the

day, did the homesick lad climb to his turret roof, and gaze wistfully seaward; but weeks and months passed without a sign of an American ship. Near the close of the year Billy learned that the *President* and *Enterprise* had returned to the United States, leaving only the *Philadelphia* and *Essex* on the Mediterranean station.

Had the American government, in spite of its boasts, given over the attempt to punish the Barbary pirates? It would seem so, and so the Bashaw declared, when, in seasons of good humor, he taunted Billy with the cowardice of his countrymen, and commended him for leaving them to cast his lot with a brave people. He also expressed an impatience at the lad's delay in accepting the religion of Mohammed, and it required all the latter's tact to persuade him that he was studying the great question with due diligence.

Several times during the winter one or both of the American frigates were seen off Tripoli; but, as they did not come to anchor nor hold any communication with the city, Billy found no opportunity for putting his cherished scheme into execution.

In the mean time he heard only once from Ruth, and then, in answer to a note unfolding his plan for their escape. Berith brought the brief message: "I will be ready."

Finally with summer again well advanced, news was received that another American fleet had reached

the Mediterranean, and that it was of such formidable character as to have already reduced Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis to terms. Again did Billy's heart beat high with hope, and again was a feverish activity shown in strengthening the fortifications of the city. When, however, the American ships appeared in the roads, and the Bashaw examined them through a glass, he smiled contemptuously. "They are many and big," he said, gazing at the imposing sight of eight tall frigates and a schooner of war; "but they cannot harm me. They are too big to come near the city, and they have no guns long enough to reach it. They are fools, and a wise man will profit by their folly."

In this the Bashaw was right; for while all of the squadron except the *Enterprise* were of too deep draught for effective service in the shallow waters of that coast, the heaviest guns with which they were armed were eighteen-pounders. The mistakes thus made were recognized, and remembered in America a year later.

The little *Enterprise* alone manifested great activity in chasing gunboats, capturing or driving ashore coasting-vessels, and appearing in all sorts of unexpected places with a boldness that caused her to be more dreaded by the Tripolitans than all the rest of the fleet put together. As Billy still considered himself attached to this schooner, he watched her movements, whenever they were visible from his

turret, with keenest delight and listened with pride to stories of her daring.

From the first appearance of the American ships, he sought anxiously for the opportunity he had awaited so long, and finally it came. Word was brought to the Bashaw that the American commodore desired a personal interview with him for the purpose of arranging terms of peace.

This request was granted, and it was planned that on a certain day the *Enterprise*, bringing the American officers, should enter the inner harbor, lie there unmolested while the negotiations were in progress, and be allowed to leave again in peace, no matter how they might terminate. Billy was informed of the details of this arrangement, because it was desired that he should act as interpreter; but when he explained that if the Americans became aware of his presence in Tripoli, they would insist that he be handed over to them for punishment as a traitor, he was excused from serving.

Finding that a dinner would be given the American officers in the evening, and that it would take place in a banquet hall surrounded by a latticed gallery, which would be occupied by the ladies of the house, our lad fixed upon that hour as the one for his hazardous venture. Of this he sent notice to Ruth, through Berith, and then with Sidi's aid began his preparations.

During his long period of ministering to the suffering among the slaves of Tripoli, Billy had won a

number of devoted friends, who would willingly risk much in his service. From these he now selected a youth named Maroc belonging to the household of one of the Bashaw's ministers to aid him. He did not disclose his project in full to Maroc, but merely requested him to visit the palace, at a certain hour, with an urgent message purporting to come from his master, and this the youth promised to do.

The few valuables that Billy proposed to carry with him he placed in his medicine chest, and to it Sidi also intrusted a packet that he said contained a parting gift from his father. The young Jew then laid aside the distinctive garments of his race, and arrayed himself in the simple costume of a slave. With everything thus in readiness the two friends waited, in nervous impatience, the hour in which they were to risk everything for freedom. They sat in silence, each busy with his own thoughts, for their hearts were too full for words.

At length the final prayer call of the day from the Muezzins announced that the time for action had arrived, and the young men started to their feet. Their hands met in a firm clasp.

"Remember, Sidi, that what we are about to undertake is for liberty or death," said the young American, his voice trembling with emotion.

"What is to be will be," replied the Jewish lad, calmly. "In any case, may the peace of God be with thee."

“And with thee,” rejoined Billy.

Then they ascended to the upper platform of the turret, taking with them only a light line, along the whole length of which knots had been tied at short intervals.

There was no moon, but the night was beautifully starlit, and a silence, only broken by the occasional barking of a dog, brooded over the city. In the harbor Billy could discern the lights of the *Enterprise*, and he gazed at them with a swelling heart.

Advancing to the edge of the platform, they looked down on the terrace lying but ten feet below them. It was silent and deserted, but even as they looked there came a slight rustle, and a dim figure moved swiftly across the flat roof in their direction.

How thankful Billy now was for the wonderful strength of his arms which, developed when he was a cripple, had never since left him. He had already tested this strength with Sidi’s weight, and knew that he was capable of pulling the young Jew up a much greater distance than that dividing the terrace from the turret platform. So, according to their rehearsed plan, he now dropped one end of the rope over the parapet, and held the other while Sidi slid down to the terrace. There he met Ruth, who had been told to expect him, seated her in a noose of the rope, and instructed her what to do.

The poor girl was trembling so violently that she could not speak, but readily agreed to everything

that Sidi proposed, and was quickly prepared for the ascent. The Jewish lad gave a low-voiced signal, and then stood waiting while the girl was slowly but steadily drawn upward. He heaved a sigh of relief as she disappeared over the parapet, and he realized that what they had regarded as the most dangerous part of the undertaking had been safely accomplished. At that moment a slight sound caused him to turn quickly. To his dismay, he saw two dark figures appear above the terrace, across which they advanced swiftly, directly to where he was standing.

As there was no possibility of escape, and as an outcry would only cause his companion to look over the parapet, with a certainty of being discovered, the brave fellow remained silently motionless. In another moment he was seized and hurried away by two of the eunuchs who guarded the harem, and who also did their work in silence.

One of these had caught an indistinct vision of Ruth during her flight to the terrace, and, not knowing whether she were a man or a woman, had summoned a fellow-guard to accompany him in pursuit. Now, believing Sidi to be the person who had been seen attempting to escape, they dragged him below, for examination as to what mischief he had been plotting.

Thus it happened that when, a minute later, Billy Vance again flung down the rope, that Sidi might be drawn up, he was amazed and bewildered to find that the latter had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FREE FOR AN HOUR

OVERJOYED as Billy was to find Ruth Dean again safely beside him, and much as he had to say to her, he did not waste a moment in idle conversation, but showed her at once the way to his room. There he bade her assume the garments that Sidi had left for her use, while he remained to assist the young Jew in regaining the terrace platform. Thus, in less than two minutes after the girl's arrival on the platform, Billy had again flung down the rope and was anxiously wondering at Sidi's delay in making use of it. He called softly several times, thinking that possibly his companion had taken this opportunity for exploring the terrace, but received no answer.

At length, alarmed that the young Jew neither appeared nor replied to his signals, Billy made fast his end of the rope, and, slipping over the parapet, let himself down to the terrace. This he explored from end to end, carefully feeling in all its dark corners, but only to be convinced that it was tenantless. During his search he came to the opening that led below; but ignorant of what might await him,

he dared not enter it. Besides, distressed as he was at Sidi's unaccountable disappearance, he knew that he owed his first duty to Ruth, and felt uneasy at having left her alone so long.

So, with reluctant steps and a heavy heart, he returned to where the rope still hung, and drew himself up hand over hand to the parapet. Having thus regained the turret platform, he was about to remove all traces of Ruth's method of escape by coiling the rope and flinging it as far as possible into a near-by garden; but with a thought of Sidi's dismay if he should return and find it gone he decided to let it remain where it was.

As Billy drew near to his own room, he was startled by the sound of voices proceeding from it; and when he pushed aside the curtain that hung before its entrance, he was for an instant amazed to see one whom he took to be Sidi calmly engaged in conversation with the slave Maroc. As he was about to demand an explanation, it suddenly occurred to him that the pretended Jew was Ruth disguised in Sidi's dress, and instead of speaking to her he turned to Maroc.

“What brings you here at this hour?” he asked.
“Is it a return of thy old malady?”

“No, effendi,” answered the slave. “It is not for myself that I have come, but on behalf of my master's chief steward, who lies grievously ill, and begs that you will attend him with all haste.”

“But I have no permission to leave the palace after nightfall.”

“An order has been obtained, and is already in the hands of the guard.”

“Does it also name my assistant, this young Jew? Without him it would be useless for me to go.”

“That has been seen to, and his name appears on the permit.”

“Then will I go, for thy master’s steward is a worthy man whose suffering I would gladly relieve. Thou also must accompany us to direct our steps.”

At this change of plan, Maroc looked, but did not express his surprise; for it had been arranged that he should remain behind, mingle with the palace slaves, enjoy a glimpse of the feast, and finally slip away unnoticed when the guests took their departure. In that case, Sidi disguised as a slave would have accompanied the fugitives in his place. Now that plan had been modified and rendered even less liable to miscarry by the mysterious disappearance of the young Jew.

Billy had no opportunity for explaining the situation to Ruth, and merely bidding her to accompany him, the party set forth. Maroc led the way, our lad in the flowing white robes of a physician followed, and the dear girl toward whose escape from slavery all his efforts for more than a year had been directed, brought up the rear, carrying the medicine chest, as had been Sidi’s custom.

They passed unquestioned until the outer entrance was gained, but here, with a sharp clash of steel, two crossed spears barred their way, and a harsh voice demanded that they give an account of themselves.

Maroc explained who they were, named their errand, and referred to the permit for them to pass, that he had recently resigned at that very gate. To all this the officer listened attentively, and then, after identifying each of the three, allowed them to pass.

“We may be detained several hours,” said Billy, as he saluted the officer and passed out, “in which case I will beg your Highness to inform your successor of the midnight watch that our return is to be expected.”

At length they were free, and the heart of the American lad beat high with exultation at the thought. If only Sidi were with them; but he was not, and the uncertainty regarding his disappearance saddened what would otherwise have been one of the most jubilant moments of Billy Vance’s life. When they had gone a short distance Maroc left them to return to his place of servitude, while the two Americans directed their steps toward the water.

Billy’s plan was to find the boat that had brought Commodore Morris ashore, and which he knew would be in waiting. Of course an officer, probably a midshipman, possibly Biddle himself, would be in charge. Billy would tell him who they were, persuade him to hide them under the *Enterprise* was

reached, and then!—even in his thoughts our lad could not express the anticipated joy of the moment when, with Ruth Dean saved, he should again tread a deck shadowed by the American flag. He outlined this plan to Ruth as they hastened through the narrow streets; while she in turn, between oft-repeated expressions of joy and thankfulness at having left the hated palace behind, told how she had eluded those who guarded the Bashaw's harem.

Billy was by this time well acquainted with the labyrinth of alleys that constituted the street system of Tripoli, and so was able to lay a course for the point at which he was certain a boat from the *Enterprise* would be found. As he had, however, only been permitted to go abroad through the city by daylight, he knew nothing of its condition at night, and was not prepared for the barrier of a stout gate, which, completely closing the street they were traversing, soon confronted them. As they could not pass this, they were obliged to turn back and seek some other way; and it was not until they had made long détours around three such obstacles, that they finally reached the water front, more than an hour later than they had intended.

The boat from the *Enterprise* was not to be seen, nor could they find a trace of it in either direction. At length, when they were almost in despair, they stumbled across the small skiff of a fisherman, with its owner asleep in the bottom. Awakening him,

they learned that the boat belonging to the war-ship of the Americans had taken its departure some time since.

“Then,” said Billy, with the tone of one having authority, “you must carry us off to that war-ship, for I have a box here, left in the palace by one of the Christians, which the Bashaw has ordered me to return to its owner.”

The man hesitated, and was on the point of refusal, when Billy added: “I will pay fifty piastres for the service; but you must make speed, or the ship will be gone.”

“If it were not for the boats of the harbor guard,” muttered the man.

“I will give one hundred piastres,” cried Billy. “Fifty now, and fifty more when we reach the ship.” With this he displayed a handful of silver coins.

“The good that is sent by Allah may not be thrown in his teeth,” said the man. “If your Highness will enter the boat, I will do what I can; but all the risk must be upon your own head.”

So the fifty piastres were paid, and the fugitives set forth on the third stage of their flight, guided by the lights of the *Enterprise*, that still showed.

They had covered about half the distance to her, and Billy was encouraging the trembling girl at his side with assurances that in a few minutes all would be well with them, when a series of ominous sounds broke upon the stillness of the night. The hoisting

of souls and the weary throb of a suspense proclaimed that the hour when was nigh to take her departure. At the same time her dark robes were already visible.

"Faster, slave! Faster! Low for your life!" cried Billy in Arabic, and then, frenzied by excitement, he sprang to his feet and yelled in English:—

"Everyone away! Away! Everyone! Wait a minute. For God's sake wait!"

Almost immediately a sharp command came from a short distance to one side, and then the sound of oars, pulled in regular cadence, denoted the approach of a well-manned boat. In spite of Billy's furious protests, the fisherman stopped rowing, and in another minute a guard-boat dashed alongside.

"Halt! in the name of the Bashaw," ordered a stern voice. "Who are you, and what are you doing on the water at this hour?"

"A messenger from the Bashaw to yonder ship," answered Billy, boldly, "and I command you to let me pass under penalty of our master's wrath."

The officer of the guard-boat put out a hand and drew the stern of the skiff close beside him.

"Is it not the Christian who serves the Bashaw as healer of his slaves?"

"I am he," answered Billy, perceiving the futility of attempting to conceal his identity.

"And with him is the Jew who acts as his assistant," continued the officer, peering keenly at Ruth.

“Truly it is my assistant, and now that you know who I am, you will let me proceed upon our master’s business; for with further delay the American ship will be gone, and may not be overtaken.”

“No, she may not be overtaken,” replied the officer, significantly, “and as you may see, she is already in motion.”

This was only too true; for as Billy looked toward the *Enterprise*, her lights disappeared, and the dark form that meant life and liberty to our fugitives slowly melted into the blackness of the night.

Billy Vance uttered a groan and buried his face in his hands, while a half-smothered sob came from the place occupied by Ruth Dean. At the same time the officer commanding the guard-boat ordered the fisherman to turn his skiff and pull toward shore.

This was instantly done, and side by side the two crafts made their way back to the hated city. During the few minutes that intervened before the landing, the two fugitives, who must now consider themselves prisoners, exchanged no word, but sitting with hand clasped in hand, they dumbly awaited whatever fate might hold in store for them.

CHAPTER XXIX

"I LOVE YOU, AND ALWAYS SHALL"

NEVER in his life had our lad experienced a feeling of such utter despair as he did upon again reaching the detested city of his slavery, with his carefully laid plans for escape come to naught. Bitterest of all was the reflection that he had involved others in his own ruin. Through his failure Ruth who had trusted him, and the Jewish lad who had aided him, were now in an infinitely worse plight than they would have been if he had never come into their lives. As the skiff gained a landing, these thoughts found expression in a groan.

At this the girl by his side clasped his hand more closely, and said, in a low tone: "Don't take it so to heart, Billy. You have done what seemed best, and I am sure no one else would have succeeded half so well. You are a dear brave boy, and I love you. If we are separated never to meet again, always remember that."

There was no time to reply, for at that moment they were bidden to step ashore, and the officer of the guard-boat ordered one of his men to search them for weapons. None being found, he said to his crew: —

"Await here my return, while I conduct these prisoners to a place of safety." Then ostentatiously cocking a pistol, he bade the two precede him into the city, while he followed closely. When they had thus traversed about half the distance to the castle, the officer called a halt, and said to Billy:—

"Effendi, you do not know me, but I know you, and am deeply in thy debt. I have a friend whom I love as a brother. Not long ago he lay dangerously ill, and you saved his life, so that I still enjoy his friendship. I know that you were endeavoring to escape to the ship of your country. I know also that if this thing comes to the ears of our master, thy life and that of this Jew will be forfeited. At the same time, remembering my indebtedness, I cannot have thy blood upon my head. Therefore, go thy ways in peace, and may Allah guard thy footsteps."

With this, to the amazement of his prisoners, the officer abruptly left them, and disappeared in the direction from which they had come. For a moment the two stood bewildered and uncertain, finding it difficult to realize that they were again free. Then, with renewed hope, they began to discuss their situation in an effort to decide what was best to be done.

"It would be useless to make another attempt to gain the American ships," said Billy, "since it will soon be daylight, and the harbor swarms with guard-boats. Besides, I gave that fisherman my last cent, and have no money left for bribery. I might return

to the castle ; but you — Oh, Ruth, what is to become of you ? ”

“ Might I not go to Berith ? ” suggested the girl. “ I am almost sure she would hide me until you could make some other plan for escape . ”

“ Undoubtedly she would , ” replied Billy ; “ but if Sidi has been captured, as I greatly fear, his presence on the terrace is certain to be connected with your disappearance, and the house of Moussa will be almost the first place searched. Besides, the gate to the Mella is closed, and will not be opened until after sunrise . ”

“ Then what can we do ? ” cried the girl, in despair.

“ The only thing I can suggest, is to return to the palace, and take up again the life of slavery that we thought we had put behind us forever . ”

“ Oh, I can’t, I can’t ! ” sobbed Ruth.

“ There is no other way that I can think of , ” said Billy, gloomily.

Finally the girl yielded, and the two sadly retraced their steps to the gilded prison house that, filled with high hopes, they had so recently left.

Their coming being expected, they had no difficulty in passing the guard at the entrance, and soon found themselves on the turret platform, where Ruth, laying aside her disguise, appeared once more in the costume of a harem slave. The rope that had been left on the chance of Sidi wanting it still hung over

the parapet. By it Ruth was to be lowered to the terrace, from which she must make her perilous way alone to the place assigned her.

For the two young souls standing on that lofty height in the darkness which immediately precedes dawn, the moment of parting was very solemn as well as pathetic in its sadness. The sole representatives of their people in all that strange land, surrounded by enemies and deadly perils, that they would gladly have faced together, their only chance of safety lay in a separation that bade fair to be unending.

"I don't take back one word of what I said in the boat," sobbed the girl.

"And I, Ruth, love you, and always have loved you, and always shall," declared Billy, vehemently.

"Here is your half of the dollar," continued Ruth; "and I want mine back. You can't think what a comfort it has been to me through all these weary months."

With this the two again exchanged the silver tokens of their friendship, and strengthened each other with promises that (D. V.) the halves of the coin should sometime be reunited.

Then Ruth said bravely: "When you find another chance to escape from this dreadful place, you must take it without waiting for me."

"I will not leave it without you," rejoined Billy.

"Oh, yes, you must. But I want you to promise that you will never tell papa what has become of

me. It is much better for him to think of me as having been lost at sea with dear aunty."

"I will not tell him, until you are again safe in his arms; for you shall be saved, Ruth. You must be. I have pledged my life to that end, and will never rest from trying, until it is accomplished."

At this moment a call from the nearest minaret, taken up and repeated from tower to tower, in all parts of the city, announced the coming of day. There was no longer time for words, but, with a quick embrace and a hasty kiss, the parting was effected. In another minute, the girl had been safely lowered to the terrace, and with one farewell upward glance, sped like a shadow across its flat surface.

With a heart heavy as lead, Billy Vance stood motionless, watching her until she disappeared. "Perhaps gone to her death," he said to himself; "and it may be weeks before I learn her fate."

So it proved; for not daring to betray his knowledge of the fact that an American girl was detained in the palace, by asking questions, Billy was obliged to depend solely upon Berith for any news from the harem, and it was several months before the Jewish maiden was again summoned to it. This was taken to be a sign that her brother had been found within the forbidden precinct, and had paid the penalty with his life; but none dared ask concerning him, and nothing was ever known.

As a matter of precaution, Billy reported to the

authorities the disappearance of his assistant, and was gravely told that every effort would be made to discover him, but that was all. So the fate of the brave lad remained one of the tragic mysteries that are so common in Oriental countries, and Billy Vance could only mourn the loss of his friend in secret, or upon the very infrequent visits that he dared pay to the house of Moussa, the Jew.

It was six months after the disastrous failure of his plan to escape, ere he learned from Berith that she had again been to the palace and there caught a glimpse of the American girl, but had not found an opportunity for speaking with her.

Still to learn that Ruth was yet alive, and an inmate of the palace, lifted a great weight of fear from Billy's mind, and almost restored him to cheerfulness.

In the mean time the American squadron, from which so much was hoped and expected, had again withdrawn, leaving only the *Enterprise* and one other vessel to maintain the blockade, since owing to the preposterous demands of the Bashaw, all peace negotiations had failed. In defiance of this slender force the Bashaw ordered his largest frigate to put to sea, which she forthwith proceeded to do; but, as her officers were better acquainted with American methods than he was, they deferred their sailing until nightfall. Even this did not serve them, for they were discovered at daylight by the little *Enterprise*, which immediately gave chase and

cornered them in a narrow bay some twenty miles to the eastward of Tripoli.

While the schooner was signalling her consort to come to her assistance, a flotilla of gunboats stole down the coast to the aid of the Tripolitan, and a large force of cavalry gathered on the shore close at hand. At half-past eight in the morning the two American vessels stood boldly into the bay and opened fire. Forty-five minutes later the Bashaw's frigate blew up with a terrible explosion, and was totally destroyed.

This incident threw the Bashaw into such savage humor that for months Billy Vance dared not appear in his presence, nor do anything to remind the tyrant of his existence. During this time he busied himself with the study of medicine, navigation, languages, and whatever else he could find in books that formed part of the plunder captured by Tripolitan pirates. These he easily secured because no one else wanted them.

So our lad entered upon the third year of his captivity. A moustache had appeared on his upper lip, his Arabic was fluent, he had almost forgotten how to dress in any but Turkish garments, and he was recognized as the leading medical authority in Tripoli. Of Ruth Dean he only knew that she was still an inmate of the palace; and though he had formed many plans for her escape, they had all been abandoned as hopeless. War with the United States

still dragged on, but nothing decisive had been done, and the Tripolitans were of the belief that it was only a question of time when the payment of tribute would be resumed.

Suddenly and unexpectedly as a clap of thunder from a clear sky, an event took place that not only confirmed them in this belief, but filled our young American with direst dismay. This was nothing more nor less than the capture of the *Philadelphia*, one of the finest frigates of the United States navy, together with twenty-two officers and three hundred men. But how this most surprising disaster came about, and its effect on the fortunes of our hero, must be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BASHAW GAINS AN AMERICAN FRIGATE

THE American squadron sent to the Mediterranean in the year 1803 for the subjugation of the Barbary pirates was the most effective yet seen in those waters. It was under command of Commodore Edward Preble, and consisted of the frigates *Constitution* and *Philadelphia*, the brigs *Siren* and *Argus*, the schooners *Enterprise*, *Nautilus*, *Vixen*, and *Scourge*, besides two bomb-vessels and six gun-boats, which were chartered from the king of Sicily. While the larger part of this fleet was operating against Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis, all of which states had again violated their solemn treaties, the *Philadelphia* and *Vixen* were detailed to blockade the port of Tripoli until such time as greater attention could be directed to that quarter.

Although warned by the recent loss of a frigate that attempts to evade this blockade were dangerous, the Bashaw refused to give them over, and one day late in October the *Vixen* started in pursuit of a corsair that had stolen out of the harbor during the night. Two days later she had not returned, and as the *Philadelphia* was working back to the station

from which she had been driven by a gale, an armed xebec was discovered attempting to gain the port. To this craft the frigate immediately gave chase.

The nature of the North African coast was at that time very little known, except to the natives, since the Turks would not chart it themselves, nor allow others to do so. Thus those on board the *Philadelphia* had no knowledge of the terrible submerged Kalinsa reef, extending for miles to the eastward of Tripoli, and lying so far off shore as to leave a broad channel between it and the mainland. As the flying xebec entered this channel at its eastern end, the frigate followed, under all plain sail; but with quartermasters in the chains to heave the lead and report soundings every few seconds.

For several miles all went well, the lead gave a constant depth of from eight to fifteen fathoms, and the chase was slowly but surely being overhauled. When she was deemed within range of the frigate's bow-guns, a couple of solid shot were hurled after her. As these did no damage, and the city was now less than three miles away, it was seen that the corsair would gain the harbor before she could be overtaken. So Captain Bainbridge reluctantly issued orders to give over the pursuit and again stand out to sea. The helm was put down, courses were hauled, yards braced, and the tall ship, heeling gracefully to the breeze, was headed off shore in the direction of

what was supposed to be deep water. But between her and it lay the unseen and unsuspected reef so cunningly hidden that not so much as a ripple betrayed its presence.

“Eight fathom,” droned a quartermaster.

“By the mark seven,” called another a few seconds later in a sharper tone, and the officers pricked up their ears.

“Six and a half!” came the startling cry in another moment.

“Port your helm! Hard aport!” ordered Captain Bainbridge.

Lee braces were instantly manned, and almost before the necessary orders had left the officer’s lips, the great fabric, trembling like a racer sharply reined, flew into the wind’s eye, but still holding dangerous headway.

“One can’t be too cautious in these pirate waters,” said Captain Bainbridge, addressing Lieutenant David Porter, “and — ”

At this moment he was interrupted by an ominous grating sound that chilled the blood of every hearer. The next instant the ship struck with a shock that flung men to the deck, caused the stout masts to creak and bend as though they were about to go by the board, and shot the frigate’s bow high out of water.

In a second of time the superb ship had become a helpless wreck, held fast in the vise-like grip of

a reef, which, as the tide was falling, strengthened its clutch with each passing minute.

In vain were guns, anchors, shot, and cables thrown overboard. In vain was the water started and the foremast cut away. The *Philadelphia* remained immovable, and after awhile careened with the ebbing tide until she lay on her beam ends.

Long before this her sorry plight had become known in the city, where the populace swarmed to their housetops to gloat over her, and whence a flotilla of gunboats was sent out for her destruction. These lay at a respectful distance, like a pack of coward jackals surrounding a wounded lion, and opened an ineffective fire. As it could not be returned, they became bolder and ventured closer until at length their shot fell on board, and white splinters began to sweep the frigate's decks. Then, seeing that he lay completely at the mercy of the pirates, and in order to save the lives of his crew, Captain Bainbridge hauled down his flag.

Upon this the Tripolitans swarmed on board, and fierce-visaged men armed to the teeth clambered by hundreds over the frigate's side. As they gained her deck, they at once began an indiscriminate plundering of officers and men, snatching swords, epaulets, watches, trinkets, and clothing from individuals, and compelling them to turn their pockets inside out. They ransacked cabins and staterooms, rifling chests, drawers, and other receptacles, until they

were laden with all they could carry. The unfortunate Americans, overpowered and helpless, were forced to endure these things in silence, since resistance would only have sealed their destruction.

Finally, half naked, and shivering in the chill of night that had descended on the lawless scene, the prisoners were ordered into boats, and taken to the city, where they were greeted by the frenzied populace with the most extravagant demonstrations of joy. Fires blazed, torches waved, guns were fired, and the frantic Arabs yelled themselves hoarse at the unprecedented sight of more than three hundred American captives who had fallen into their hands without the cost of a single life.

Although it was now ten o'clock at night, the Bashaw was so desirous of gazing upon his prisoners, that, escorted by a strong force of cavalry, they were marched through the densely crowded streets to the palace. There in his great council chamber, surrounded by an imposing retinue of ministers, officers, and guards, the ruler of Tripoli awaited their coming. After being sufficiently gloated over and sharply questioned, the captives were given a supper, and led away to the quarters assigned them, the seamen to the common prison of the city, and their officers to the building formerly occupied as an American Consulate.

Early that morning Billy Vance, in accordance with his usual custom, had ascended to his turret

platform, in hopes of catching a glimpse of one of the American ships. By this time he had acquired a glass, and, while sweeping the horizon with it, he discovered the *Philadelphia* and her chase. For an hour he watched them, and then, to his dismay, saw the frigate alter her course so as to head directly for the Kalinsa. He had long before learned of the existence of this reef, and now, in his excitement, he waved his arms and yelled frantic warnings to his countrymen three miles away. When the great ship struck, and remained motionless, he could not believe that she was actually aground, but stared blankly, as though expecting, with each moment, to see her resume her course. From his stupefaction he was roused by a voice close at hand, exclaiming:—

“Great is Allah, and greatly to be praised! Now has He indeed delivered the Giaours into the hands of those who serve Him.”

Turning quickly, Billy was dismayed to find himself in the presence of the Bashaw, who, provided with a powerful glass, was closely studying the position of the unfortunate frigate. Our lad would have quietly withdrawn, but the other intercepted his movement, saying:—

“Stay, Christian! It is my wish that you witness to the end this miracle worked by the Prophet for the glory of Allah and the benefit of true believers. When it is finished, then shall I expect that, without further delay, you will declare for the Faith.”

With this the Bashaw again turned to the ship, uttering from time to time exclamations of fierce joy as he noted the fruitless efforts of her crew to extricate themselves from their unhappy predicament. From another corner of the platform Billy also watched, but with a heavy heart; and so these two passed the greater part of that memorable day.

Being commanded to attend in the council chamber that evening, and witness the full humiliation of his countrymen, Billy did so, but kept as much as possible in the background to avoid being recognized. Fortunately he was not called upon to act as interpreter on this occasion, that office being filled by a Scotchman named Lisle, who had embraced Mohammedanism, and risen to a command in the Bashaw's navy.

It was a trying ordeal for our lad; but his heart was thrilled at sight of those fearless American faces, and by the sound of his native tongue. He longed to rush forward and proclaim himself as one of them; but the thought that he might be better able to serve them by retaining his present position restrained him.

So he only scanned eagerly the countenances of the captives, hoping to recognize among them a familiar face; but he was too far from them for a good view, and did not succeed in identifying any except Captain Bainbridge and Lieutenant Porter.

Several of the officers had received hurts from flying splinters during the bombardment of the *Phila-*

delpdia by the gunboats, but the slight wounds thus gained had not yet been cared for. Noting this, the Bashaw asked if there had been no surgeon aboard the wrecked frigate. He was answered that there was one, but in the excitement of the moment the injuries received had been deemed too slight to call for immediate treatment, and that later the surgeon had been compelled to leave the ship without any of the articles used in his profession.

"Then," said the Bashaw, magnanimously, "I will send my own physician to attend such of my American friends as are wounded."

Billy saw smiles and meaning looks exchanged between the captives when this was translated to them, and readily divined what they were saying to one another concerning Turkish medicos in general, and the one who was to visit them in particular. When, therefore, he was ordered to follow them to their quarters and minister to their hurts, he wondered not a little as to the nature of his reception. He also wondered if it would not be best to conceal his identity, at least for the present, since he strangely suspected the Bashaw's object in sending him to them was to test his loyalty, and that his behavior while with the captives would be closely watched.

As one of the charlatan doctors of the palace, whom he regarded as an enemy, was detailed to accompany him, he became convinced that this was the case. Therefore, he decided to appear before the

Americans only as a Turkish physician, finish his business with them as quickly as possible, and defer until a more favorable time the revelation of his true character.

To carry out this scheme, he provided himself with a pair of spectacles; and, concealing the lower portion of his face in the folds of his caic, was ready to set forth.

CHAPTER XXXI

BIDDLE AND THE BLOOMING TURK

ACCOMPANIED by torch-bearers, and surrounded by a guard of soldiers, which was as necessary for protection on that night of wild excitement as it was to force a passage through the packed streets of the city, Billy Vance made his slow way to the prison house of the American officers.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, these were still so wrought up by the events of the day as to be unable to sleep, and were gathered in the largest room at their disposal, gloomily discussing their distressing situation. At one side, a little aloof from the others, stood Captain Bainbridge, with folded arms, and face expressive of anguish. He had lost his ship through no fault of his own; but would that fact be recognized at home? If not, he would undoubtedly be dismissed from the service, and disgraced for life.

It is pleasant to note that the court subsequently convened to investigate the loss of the *Philadelphia*, completely exonerated Captain Bainbridge from all blame, and upon his return to the United States he was received with honor.

As he could not gaze into the future, however, and

as no cheering ray from it could illumine the darkness of the present, the brave commander was, at the time of Billy's visit, in a state of despondency, from which the efforts of Lieutenant Porter, who stood close at hand, failed to arouse him. The others stood or sat about the room in little groups, talking in low tones, and wondering what disposition would be made of them by the Bashaw.

When the physician of the palace was announced, conversation ceased, and all eyes were turned upon the newcomer. There was nothing in his appearance to suggest that he was other than what he seemed, namely, a Turk of the better class, since he was robed in full Turkish costume of white turban, caic, and caftan. His legs below the knees were bare, and he wore pointed yellow slippers. Concealed beneath his flowing outer robes were other vestments, gorgeous in color and embroidery, while about his waist, but also hidden from view, was a broad girdle of crimson silk. Embarrassing as the situation was for our lad, his heart overflowed with joy, at finding himself once more among his countrymen, and he gazed eagerly at the resolute face of Lieutenant Porter, who, as will be remembered, was executive officer of the *Enterprise* during Billy's short term of service aboard that plucky little schooner. For a moment he imagined this gentleman to be the only one present whom he knew. Then he was startled by hearing a familiar voice call out:—

“Say, Doc, why don’t you step forward and extend the right hand of fellowship to your African colleague ? ”

“He’s no colleague of mine,” retorted Surgeon Ridgely. “And I’ll be hanged if I have anything to do with him.”

“You’ll probably be hanged if you don’t,” laughed the other ; “for he’s a most ferocious appearing black-guard. Looks as though he wouldn’t hesitate a moment to eat an American, blood, bones, and all. Hello, Tod, he’s looking at you. Step right up and defy the villian by letting him dress your wound.”

“I’m game to do it if you will,” rejoined Midshipman Tod Patterson, “only my wound, as you call it, is a mere scratch, while yours looks to be more serious.”

“Nonsense ! It’s nothing at all ; but I’m with you ; so walk up and face the music. I only hope he won’t turn you into a greater idiot than you are by the exercise of his black art ! Hurry, or he’ll be gone. Don’t you see he’s spreading his magic carpet in readiness to fly away ? Be careful not to step on it, or you’ll go too.”

“I wonder if those attendants are genii in disguise,” suggested another.

“No, they are only ‘supers,’ ” growled Surgeon Ridgely, “brought in for effect, since the whole science of medicine as understood by these beastly Turks is a roaring farce. I doubt if this duffer does

a thing besides mutter incantations. But give him a chance, gentlemen, to show what he can do, while I stand by to interfere if he attempts anything serious."

In the mean time two slaves had, as was customary, spread a bit of carpet on the floor, opened Billy's medicine chest, and laid out in order a number of articles that he might need. Then they retired.

"Rather a neat-looking outfit," commented the surgeon. "Wonder where he stole it? Shows him to be a shrewd chap to make such a display. All done for effect, though, as, of course, he can't have any idea of the use of those things. By Jove!" he exclaimed a few minutes later, as Billy finished operating on Midshipman Patterson. "That's a neat bandage. Couldn't have done better myself. This bare-legged chap has picked up a smattering of surgery, somewhere, after all. Don't know about allowing him to experiment with Biddle though; for his is a more serious case."

"Guess I'll risk it," laughed he of the voice that had sounded so familiar to Billy Vance. "To be operated on by a bloody Barbary pirate, who would much rather cut my head off than cure it, will be an experience to relate at home."

With this, a blood-besmeared young fellow, whose head was encircled by a rude bandage that had evidently been hastily improvised, stepped forth.

"Now, Abdallah, or Hamet, or Haroun al Raschid,

or whatever else your barbaric name is, fire away and do your worst," he said, looking with a grin at the spectacles of the Bashaw's medical adviser. "Oh! wouldn't I just like to kick the stuffing out of your bare shins, and teach you to dance a can-can in those yellow toothpicks," he added in suave accents, at the same time making a profound bow.

Billy could not repress a smile; and, as the young scapegrace saw it, he winked to his comrades. "That's the way to fix 'em," he said. "This Turkish bugaboo thinks I'm paying him compliments."

So this was the meeting between Billy Vance and his chum of the *Enterprise*, Midshipman James Biddle, that the former had so often imagined with longing anticipations. Until that moment he had not recognized Biddle, and now his hands trembled as he began to loosen the bandage, in order to examine the jagged, deep scalp wound from which his friend was suffering.

"Ow! Steady, you lubber! I mean your blooming Highness and Sheik of many thieves!" exclaimed Biddle, wincing as his raw wound was exposed.

Upon this Billy braced himself with an effort, tried to forget who his patient really was, and proceeded to dress the hurt with such skill and delicacy as to call forth approbation even from Surgeon Ridgely, who carefully watched each movement.

"It is simply wonderful!" he cried; "those stitches

were taken as neatly as though the trick had been learned in a Philadelphia hospital."

By this time the other officers were crowding around and regarding Billy's work with decided interest. Finally, when the wound had been cleaned, sewn up, anointed with an aromatic salve, and neatly bandaged, the young operator turned to his assistant, who was now the only native in the room, and gave him an order in Arabic. As the man hesitated to obey it, Billy stamped his foot and made a gesture so full of menace that the other hastily fled and disappeared.

Then, no longer able to restrain himself, our lad flung his arms about Biddle's neck with a torrent of words that were so mingled with sobs and laughter as to be unintelligible.

"Hold on! Hands off! Help! I say, this disgusting pirate is choking me!" yelled the latter, struggling to free himself from the embrace.

Before any one could touch him, Billy loosed his hold, tore off turban and spectacles, caic and caftan, and, to the utter amazement of all present, cried out in unmistakable English:—

"Don't you know me, Jim Biddle? Don't you recognize your old messmate of the *Enterprise*?"

For a moment Midshipman Biddle stared in blankest incredulity at the gorgeously clad figure before him. Then as the bewildering truth forced itself into his mind, he uttered a shout of delighted recognition.



BILLY PROCEEDED TO DRESS THE HURT WITH SKILL AND DELICACY.

“Billy Vance, or I’m a tinker! Hold me tight, somebody, quick! Billy Vance off on leave, and turned into a blooming Turk? Oh, you villain! If you don’t deserve the soundest kind of a thrashing for practising such a low-down trick on officers of the United States navy, and I’ve a mind to give it to you this very minute. The cheek! The audacity! Rigged out in a nightshirt, flying the colors of a medico, and playing us off for a lot of hayseeds! Yes, I must do it.”

With this the harum-scarum fellow would have attempted to carry his threat into execution then and there, had he not been interrupted by Lieutenant Porter, who, with the others, had gazed in amazement on these remarkable proceedings. Now stepping hastily forward, he said:—

“Hold on, Mr. Biddle; if I remember rightly, I have already had to warn you against fighting with this young gentleman.” Then, turning to Billy with outstretched hand he exclaimed: “Can it be possible that you are Midshipman William Vance of the *Enterprise*, who left that schooner more than two years ago on a leave of absence, and has not since been heard from until this moment?”

“I believe I am, sir,” replied Billy, his voice husky and choking with joyful emotion.

“But how in the name of all that is improbable do you happen to be here at this time and in this disguise?”

As Billy knew that his unwelcome assistant would shortly return, he condensed his narrative into the fewest possible words and gave an outline of his adventures up to date.

“But why this disguise, and this playing at doctor? Why did you not declare yourself openly at once?”

“Because I believed I could serve you and the American cause better, by retaining my position in the palace than by joining in your captivity, greatly as I should prefer to do the latter. I believe so still, and beg that you will treat me with apparent contempt, which I will in turn report to the Bashaw. I will, however, keep in constant communication with you, and stand ready to assist in any plan that you may suggest. Now, I must resume my disguise, as you call it, though I have worn it so long that it seems a very proper costume; for my assistant, who is really a spy on my actions, may return at any moment. He is a genuine Turkish quack, and I have sent him for some of his own medicines, which I shall prescribe for my patient here; but which, at the same time, I would advise him not to take.”

“Thanks,” said Biddle; “and I’d see you hanged before I’d take ‘em, anyhow.”

In the fulness of his joy Billy only laughed at this old-time outburst, as he again adjusted his turban and spectacles. Then he was formally presented to Captain Bainbridge, who expressed great satisfaction at finding so valuable an ally in the enemies’ camp.

“Could you manage to get a letter to Commodore Preble?” he asked.

“I am not sure, sir; but I think I could.”

“Very well. I shall probably prepare one for you to deliver, if possible, within a few days.”

At this moment Billy’s assistant returned, and his intercourse with his countrymen was ended for the present.

CHAPTER XXXII

A CONFLICT BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY

ACTING upon the suggestion that Billy had just given them, the American officers at once began to treat him with well-feigned aversion and distrust. Biddle even went so far as to shake a fist at him behind his back, and make other gestures expressive of the utmost contempt. When a native decoction brought by the assistant was produced and handed to the quick-witted fellow, with instructions concerning its use, he insolently poured it on the floor, and, announcing that though he might be hanged, he did not propose to be poisoned, if he knew it, turned his back with a further muttering of vague threats. Nor could Billy induce a third man who bore the marks of a flying splinter to accept his services. Instead of so doing this individual applied to Surgeon Ridgely, who, coolly appropriating such things as he needed from the open medicine chest, dressed the wound himself.

“It is useless for us to remain here longer,” said Billy to his assistant, with simulated anger. “As you see, these Christians will accept no service from

me, and I will not stay to be insulted. Let us then return whence we came."

With this the two left the room, amid contemptuous laughter and jeering remarks, the tone of which was readily appreciated by the Turk.

So he, as well as Billy, reported to the Bashaw that the Americans would have nothing to do with a renegade from their own ranks: at which the Tripolitan ruler was mightily pleased.

So convinced was he by this incident that our lad was now bound to his service by unbreakable ties, that he ordered him to frequent the company of the captives, and make daily reports of their conversation — a mission that Billy accepted gladly though with great pretended reluctance. While the American seamen were at once set to work at rigging, caulking, and repairing the Tripolitan fighting ships, as well as at strengthening the fortifications, their officers, for whom an enormous ransom was expected, were for a time treated with great leniency, being even allowed to ride out into the suburbs under guard, and spend many hours in the groves by which the city was surrounded. Billy Vance always accompanied these excursions; and, under pretence of angry recrimination enjoyed much pleasant intercourse with his friends. Thus he would remark in a grieved tone to Biddle:—

"I say, old man, you can't imagine my delight at having you with me once more." Whereupon

the other, with a fierce expression of countenance, would reply:—

“Don’t mention it, my dear fellow. You know I am always willing to oblige my friends. But tell me some more about Blount. He must have been an awfully clever chap, and I wish I could have known him. The way he took the wind of that Johnny at the spread was fine.”

Although the light-hearted and irresponsible “reefers” could thus extract pleasure from their situation, their elders were constantly planning for the future, and engaged in many an anxious consultation concerning it. Their mental distress was increased shortly after the loss of the *Philadelphia*, by seeing that beautiful frigate hauled off the reef by the Tripolitans and towed to an anchorage in front of the Bashaw’s castle.

Before surrendering, Captain Bainbridge had caused holes to be bored in her bottom, and ordered her pumps to be choked, so that if she should be hauled into deep water, she would sink. He also had her magazines flooded, and took such other precautions as time would permit, to render her useless to the enemy.

They, however, at once, went skilfully to work to save her, plugged the holes, fitted new pumps, carried heavy anchors out astern, and two days after the disaster, aided by a spring tide, which, together with a strong northerly wind, caused unusually high

water, succeeded in getting her once more afloat. Then they raised the guns, anchors, and shot, that had been thrown overboard, and replaced her powerful batteries.

Thus reequipped and anchored in the inner harbor, amid a fleet of cruisers, gunboats, and other armed vessels, she formed a formidable addition to the defences of the city. The Bashaw never tired of gazing at and gloating over her, while to see their proud frigate thus humiliated under the pirate flag of the crescent was more galling to the Americans than anything else they were called upon to bear.

“It won’t be borne by the fellows of the squadron,” was a remark often heard among the younger officers. “And the minute they learn what has happened, they will begin to plan her recapture. Yes, sir; they will cut her out from under the very guns of the batteries, see if they don’t.”

While the belief was general that an attempt of some kind would be made against the Bashaw’s latest acquisition, Captain Bainbridge realized the enormous difficulty of such an undertaking. As the frigate’s foremast had not been replaced, and she had been further dismantled by the sending down of sails and yards, she could only be moved by towing with small boats, which, under the murderous fire that could be concentrated on them, would prove an impossibility. She might, however, be destroyed, and so withdrawn from the service of the enemy.

Captain Bainbridge became so filled with this idea that he embodied it in a letter to Commodore Preble, which he wrote with lemon juice that would be invisible until exposed to heat, and intrusted to Billy Vance to forward.

Our lad conceived several plans for doing this, but they all failed him. Then came a terrible mental conflict between two duties, the one owed to his country, and his obligation not to desert Ruth Dean, since he was almost certain that alone, he might effect an escape, and deliver the letter. He felt that he ought to go, and knew that he could not.

All at once a way was opened, by which the performance of both duties became possible. One day a half-naked street urchin who had been following him as he walked toward the palace, suddenly darted ahead, paused and gazed in his face, as he approached. Then, seeing that he had attracted attention, he uttered the single word "Berith," gave a shrill shout, and scampered impishly away.

Could it be that this was a message from Sidi's sister? It was possible, and, at any rate, Billy had for some time meditated a visit to his friends of the Mella. He wished to deliver to Moussa the packet that Sidi had placed in the medicine chest on the night of their melancholy attempt at escape, and which had never since been opened. Now was as good an opportunity as he was likely to have for doing this, and he could also find out if Berith had

summoned him. So he turned his steps toward the Mella.

The Jewish maiden had indeed sent for him and had important news. The Bashaw was about to remit his annual tribute of female slaves to his master, the Sultan of Turkey, and Ruth Dean was among those selected.

For a moment Billy's heart seemed to stop its beating. In all this time he had failed to accomplish the task to which he had devoted his life, and now even the slender opportunities thus far granted were to be taken from him. This was his first thought. Then came a flash of inspiration.

"If she goes, I also will go to Constantinople," he exclaimed; and in Berith's eyes he read approval of his resolve. How he proposed to carry out this sudden determination, he did not divulge, because he did not know. He merely questioned Berith as to how and when the journey of the slaves was to be made; but she could only tell him that they were to go by sea.

Before bidding farewell to the friendly Jews, whom he expected never again to meet, Billy attempted to restore to Moussa the packet that had belonged to Sidi. The old man, however, begged him to retain it as a memento of the lad whom they had both loved, and as he declared it to be a thing of trifling value, the young American consented to do so.

It was several days before the anxious lad could

acquire the information he wanted, but through close observation it finally came to him. The armed ketch *Mastico*, a small but swift vessel employed by the Bashaw as a despatch boat, was preparing for a voyage, and being fitted to receive passengers. Convinced that the slaves were to be transported to Constantinople in this craft, Billy noted closely the progress of her preparations.

Knowing also that it was customary to send a physician with such an expedition, to promote the health of the slaves, that they might reach Constantinople in good condition, he kept close watch of those employed about the palace, in an effort to discover which of them had been detailed for this duty. At length he found reason to believe that it was the old quack, who had accompanied him on his first official visit to the American captives. To make sure, he congratulated him on having gained an opportunity to visit the great city of the Turkish Empire.

“How did you know I was to accompany the slaves?” inquired the old man.

“Because,” replied Billy, boldly, “I myself applied for the appointment, and was told that it had already been given to you.”

“Yes,” answered the other, slyly. “It would not be seemly to select a youth, even though he were of approved skill, for such a service.”

“I suppose not,” agreed Billy. “Yet I hoped for the opportunity of testing a remedy against sea-

sickness, the recipe for which I recently obtained from the American surgeon. It is said to be of marvellous efficacy, and certain to make famous the name of him who shall introduce it into any country where it is not yet known."

"It must surely be known to the wise men of Turkey?"

"No; for it is a recent discovery, and as yet only used in England, where the American came to a knowledge of it but a month ago. My opinion is that he stole the secret, and I may as well confess to you that I, in turn, stole it from him."

At this the quack regarded his young rival with a greater respect than he had ever before felt. "Can we not come to some understanding by which I may test this wonderful remedy in thy stead?" he asked, his pig-like eyes shining greedily. "I will gladly accord to thee all the honor that may result, and claim but a small portion of the profits."

"It might be done," replied Billy, slowly, as though carefully considering the proposition. "Since I am so well assured of thy honesty, and small regard for self-interest. Still —"

"By the beard of the Prophet, I will deal with thee as though thou wert my own brother," interrupted the other, eagerly.

"Then so let it be," agreed Billy. "Thou shalt have the secret, and I will intrust my interest therein to thy honor."

"Give it to me now, for on the morrow we take our departure."

"No," said Billy, "for the remedy needs to be as freshly compounded as possible. Come to my room within a half hour of the time set for sailing, and I will have a small quantity prepared for thy immediate use. Then also will I give thee a copy of the recipe."

As the old quack could not make better terms, he was forced to agree to this proposition, and toward evening of the next day he approached the little room in which our lad impatiently awaited him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

RUTH AND BILLY SAIL FOR CONSTANTINOPLE

HAVING determined to sail on the *Mastico* in place of the quack who had been assigned to her, Billy had perfected his plans for so doing, and made careful preparations for the reception of his expected visitor. Thus, no sooner did the old fraud, whose greed had led him into this trap, enter the doorway with a profound salaam to the sole occupant of the room, than the latter sprang forward, and hurled him to the floor. Ere the victim of this rude greeting could recover breath or voice, he was gagged and bound. Then, in spite of his struggles, he was made to inhale the fumes of a drug that quickly induced slumber from which he would not awake for many hours. Billy next dragged the unconscious form to his own bed, threw a blanket over the sleeper, that he might not be readily recognized, and left him to enjoy his nap.

All this having been successfully accomplished, our lad disguised himself with a false beard, long and gray, spectacles, and the green turban of the sleeping man, who was entitled to wear this badge of distinction, for having made a pilgrimage to

Mecca. Then, securing his medicine chest and dropping the curtain of the room that had been his for so long, he descended, with dignified steps, as became his assumed character, to the main entrance of the palace.

A donkey, held by a slave, stood outside.

"Is that the beast of Vance Effendi?" demanded Billy, in pompous tone.

"Surely yes, hadji," answered the slave, with a humble bow.

"Then will I make use of it, since its owner is but an infidel dog. Bring it hither, that I may mount."

The slave dared not disobey one who wore a green turban, and when the great man was safely seated in the saddle, accepted further orders to clear a way through the city streets to where the *Mastico* awaited this last passenger.

So Billy Vance made a triumphal exit from the place of his captivity, preceded by a slave laying about him with a stick, and shouting lustily: "Make way! Make way for the hadji! Make way!"

"If Biddle could only see me now," thought Billy, who, in spite of his anxiety, was conscious of the comical side of his position.

Hardly had this thought crossed his mind, when the slave redoubled the noise of his cries, and by vehement effort compelled a small party of Americans who were issuing from a side street to halt until

the hadji should pass. Biddle was among them, and, moved to anger by this proceeding, he began to hurl abuse in hearty English terms at the pretended hadji. Upon this the latter halted his humble steed, and answered the American with such a torrent of revilings in Arabic, as drew forth shouts of commendation from the natives thronging the street. After a minute of this, and as he again whipped up his donkey, Billy could not resist the temptation to add:—

“Good-bye, James. Don’t be too free with your tongue.”

At this the crowd roared with delight; for though they did not understand what was said, they were gratified that one of themselves should be able to answer the unbeliever in his own barbarous tongue.

As for Biddle, he stood for an instant like one petrified. Then he screamed after the departing hadji: “Oh, you villain! If I don’t thrash you for this!”

Billy only shook a fist in reply; but again the crowd roared, and accompanied their champion with acclamations to the water’s edge. There a boat was in waiting; and in two minutes our lad was being assisted over the side of the ketch *Mastico* by her master, who saluted the green turban, gray beard, and spectacles of the hadji with deepest respect.

“We will sail at once,” said Billy, laconically, and in firm tones, though inwardly quaking lest his disguise should be penetrated.

"Immediately shall we take our departure," replied the master of the ketch.

"Also," said Billy, haughtily, "I will retire to the cabin, where I beg not to be disturbed. When I am ready, then will I come on deck."

The master of the ketch bowed low in sign of complaisance, and the young American, greatly relieved to have this dreaded interview so successfully concluded, disappeared down the companionway. He had intended remaining below until morning, with a view to avoiding any conversation with his fellow-voyagers; but quickly discovered that this would be impossible on account of the heat, the offensive odors, and the vermin, that rendered the place unendurable.

So he very soon returned to the deck, and discouraging any attempt at friendly intercourse, stood by himself, watching the vanishing city that he hoped to have left behind forever. He was also wondering, if Ruth were really on board that very vessel, how he should find a chance of communicating with her, and what course of action he should pursue on reaching Constantinople; for until this moment his plans had only included the securing of a passage on the *Mastico*.

While he was thus meditating, the final call to prayers for that day came faint but distinct across the shadowed waters from the distant city minarets. Thus reminded that he now had a character for

sanctity to maintain, Billy dropped on his knees. Directly the master of the ketch sprang to his side.

“The east, hadji! The holy east!” he exclaimed, in an agitated voice. “You are facing the north! See, here is a compass.”

“With the turning of the ship, I am indeed bewildered,” replied Billy, “and owe thee thanks, good captain, for correcting my error before I had committed the sin of calling upon Allah with my face turned from the sacred tomb. If you will show me where this compass may be found, I will consult it frequently, that there may be no future chance of such lamentable error.”

The master pointed out the place, and often during that night did the devout hadji consult the compass, since a vow of which he informed the master compelled him to assume the attitude of prayer at short intervals. Once, while thus engaged, he found the opportunity of slipping a bit of iron under the compass card, so that the needle was deflected several degrees to the westward of north.

“There,” he said to himself with a satisfied air; “if that is not discovered, it will cause these chaps to lay a course for the Adriatic, rather than the Gulf of Corinth, and they will find themselves in the vicinity of Syracuse, long before they see Constantinople. Then something else may turn up.”

As Syracuse was the place appointed by Commodore Preble for the rendezvous of his squadron,

Billy would have been more than delighted to carry the *Mastico* directly into that port; but dared not alter the pointing of the needle too much, for fear its discrepancy with the bearing of the celestial orbs should be discovered.

Early the next morning the hadji, as became one of his sanctity, uttered the Mussulman call for prayer, and so established his position beyond a doubt in the minds of all on board. After this he passed hours in poring over the leaves of the Koran, only interrupting his studies to give the prayer calls at the appointed hours; and his marvellous piety was so evident that no one ventured to converse with him, or even to intrude upon his meditations.

Only once was he summoned back to earth, and then he was humbly entreated to make the daily inspection of slaves customary on such voyages.

For some time Billy had been watching from behind his spectacles the formless female figures, who, with covered faces, had been allowed to come up from their stifling quarters in the hold for an hour's breathing of fresh air on deck. He hoped in some way to be able to recognize Ruth, if she were indeed among them, but thus far had failed to do so, since except for height they all looked alike. How should he ever know her or betray his own identity to her alone?

While puzzling over this question, he recalled the silver tokens possessed by each, and in another moment the one depending from his neck hung out-



ONE OF THE STRANGE SAILS LEFT ITS FELLOWS AND
STARTED IN PURSUIT.

side of his garments in plain view. A little later he was asked to inspect the slaves, and determine the state of their health by intuition. He might glance at an eye or touch his fingers to a pulse ; but Mussulman etiquette forbade anything more.

So Billy with much inward turmoil, but with undisturbed countenance, passed down the row of bundled figures that were huddled under the weather bulwarks, and gravely felt of each little wrist as it was outheld to him. He found most of the poor girls to be suffering from sea-sickness, and ordered that they be kept on deck as long as possible ; but he reached the very end of the row before discovering her whom he sought. Then the slim, henna-tipped fingers of an outstretched hand clutched convulsively at his, and he gazed into a pair of brown eyes that were staring wildly at the broken coin hanging from his neck.

“Ruth,” he whispered as he bent over her. Then he said aloud in Arabic : “There is no cause for alarm, my daughter. Be brave, and all shall go well with thee.”

The duty of inspection was concluded, and the hadji was free to resume his study of the Koran. How he hated it, and longed to talk with Ruth instead. But that might not be, since an impassable gulf still kept them apart. So he could only rejoice in the knowledge that she was on board, and cast occasional furtive glances in her direction.

Another night passed, and another day shed its light over the ocean. There was land to the westward, and a fleet of sails close at hand. Instantly upon discovering these, the course of the ketch was changed, and she fled like a sea-fowl startled by a sudden danger. At this one of the strange sails left its fellows and started in pursuit, at the same time firing a shot to which the *Mastico* paid no attention. Her master believed her to be too speedy a craft to yield a race to anything less swift than a fast frigate, while the vessel now chasing him was only a schooner.

“Have no fears, effendi, she will not catch us,” he said to the supposed hadji, who stood gazing with evident excitement at the on-coming vessel.

Billy was indeed alarmed, but it was for fear that the schooner would fail to overtake them, since he had just discovered an American ensign fluttering at her main peak, and was almost certain that she was the *Enterprise*. She must catch them, and yet they were steadily slipping away from her,—at least, the master, with beaming face, declared they were.

If only something on board the ketch would give way, or if some kind of a drag could be got overboard. Thus thinking, Billy changed his position so as to lean against a sheet at which the great after lateen sail was tugging until it was taut as a harp-string. No one noticed him, nor would they have discovered what he was doing if they had, since the movement of his hand was concealed beneath his flowing robe.

Suddenly the straining rope snapped in twain with a report like a pistol shot, the great sail streamed out with the wind like a gigantic banner, and at the same moment the green-turbaned hadji, who had not expected the sheet to be severed so easily, fell into the sea, still clinging to an end of the parted rope.

Something had given way, and Billy Vance had managed to get a drag overboard.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE "PHILADELPHIA" MUST BE RETAKEN

THROWN into wildest confusion by this mishap, the crew of the ketch ran aimlessly to and fro, while the master, bawling contradictory orders, tore his beard and stamped furiously on the deck. With his principal sail streaming uselessly in the air his position was hopeless, and, to avert another shot from the on-rushing American schooner, he hauled down the crescent flag in token of surrender.

Two minutes later the *Enterprise* rounded sharply to a cable's length away, and a boat put off from her side. Its crew had not pulled half a dozen strokes when they were startled by a cry for help, that came to them in unmistakable English from close at hand. Looking in that direction, they caught sight of an uplifted arm as it sank beneath the surface.

"He may be an American!" exclaimed the officer in command of the boat. "Give way, port! Back, starboard! Steady! All together! Look out for him there in the bow."

The bowman of the boat was a powerful negro who, at this command, laid in his oar and stood up, peering eagerly forward. Suddenly he leaped

overboard with a splendid header, and disappeared. Nearly a minute elapsed before he again came to the surface ; but he had accomplished his object, and was dragging a heavy burden. Catching hold of an extended oar, he was drawn alongside. Strong hands relieved him of his encumbrance ; and, as the apparently lifeless form of a young man clad in Turkish costume was lifted over one side of the boat the negro clambered in over the other.

As the latter glanced at the face of him whom he had thus snatched from a watery grave, his eyes bulged and his lower jaw fell. His whole expression was of terror, mingled with unbounded amazement.

"What's the matter? Do you think you are looking at a ghost?" demanded the officer of the boat, sharply.

"Yes, sah," answered Dolphus ; for the negro was indeed our old acquaintance of that name. "I takin' him fo' de ghos' ob a young gen'leman I uster know. Him de dead image ob Marse Billy Vance."

"Vance? Vance?" repeated the officer, as though striving to recall where he had heard the name. "Not Midshipman Vance of our service?"

"Yes, sah, dat him."

"Good Heavens, man! It can't be. But, on the chance, we must get him on board at once. Give way; all together!"

So the boat dashed back to the schooner, and a limp form was handed up her side.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" asked Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, who now commanded the *Enterprise*. "I thought you were ordered to take possession of that ketch."

"Yes, sir; but I fell in with an American, said to be Midshipman Vance. As he called for help, and was evidently drowning, I took the liberty of rescuing him, and now have the honor to report him as having come on board."

"Midshipman Vance!" cried Decatur. "Impossible! But you did quite right, sir, and now you may proceed on your original errand."

With this the lieutenant turned to the motionless form that had just been laid on his deck, and over which the ship's surgeon was already bending. There was no longer any disguise of green turban, spectacles, or beard; and yet Decatur could not believe that the moustached face, which, despite its pallor, was still resolute and manly, was also that of the crippled lad, whom he remembered as the long-ago inmate of a Philadelphia hospital.

"Does any one here recognize this man?" he asked of his crew, who were gathered as close as etiquette permitted.

"I does, sah," replied black Dolphus, who had been allowed to remain on board. "He Marse Billy Vance what sail wif me on de packet *Polly* an' de privateer *Lageel*. When I las' seen him he war on de pirate felucca, when de pirates tun us adrif' in de small

boat. De time when de Spaniards pick us up, and tek us into Gibraltar, whar yo' 'member, sah, I 'list' boa'd de ole *'Prise*. Yessah — ”

“ That will do,” interrupted Decatur. “ Does any one else recognize him? ”

“ Yes, sir, I do,” cried a sailor, eagerly, at the same time stepping forward and pulling his forelock. “ He was in charge of the brig *l'Agile*, and I was her mate, when she was captured by the British cruiser *Fleetwood*.”

“ Let me see,” mused Decatur; “ your name is Swain, and you deserted from the *Fleetwood*, did you not? ”

“ No, sir; I escaped from her,” replied the man.

“ Quite right, and I accept your amendment,” said Decatur. Then he added: “ With such a weight of testimony I must believe that this is indeed poor Vance, and I only hope that he has not left us for good this time.”

“ I don't believe he has, sir,” put in the ship's surgeon, who was hard at work over the unconscious lad. “ I can detect signs of life, and believe I shall yet be able to pull him through.”

“ Good! carry him below, and report to me as soon as he regains consciousness; for doubtless he can give us valuable information.”

At this moment a cry from forward attracted Decatur's attention, and turning quickly he saw the pirate ketch that had so recently surrendered, in

the act of slipping swiftly away from the boat he had sent to take possession.

Her master had taken advantage of the delay caused by Billy's rescue, to bend on a new sheet rope, and again set his great mainsail. Then, as he was cut off from the open sea by the other vessels of the American squadron, he headed for the Sicilian coast, which was in plain view, and darted away in that direction.

The *Enterprise* fired a couple of ineffective shots after the flying vessel, but it was several minutes before her boat could be picked up, and the chase again resumed. It was soon seen, however, that on this new tack, the American so clearly outfooted the nimble Tripolitan that the latter would be overtaken; but before this could happen the ketch had passed out of sight, behind the high land of Cape Passaro.

When next discovered she lay motionless, but with all sail still standing, and a thin volume of smoke issuing from her main hatch. It was evident that she had been run aground, and set on fire; but, in spite of the danger from an explosion, a boat from the *Enterprise* was quickly alongside and its crew clambering aboard.

The fire in the hold of the ketch had been so recently started that it was easily extinguished; but every soul of her crew and passengers had made good their escape to the land, where some of them could still be seen on the beach. A pursuit of these being

clearly useless, all efforts were directed toward floating the stranded vessel, and, as she had struck on a rising tide, this was accomplished after an hour of hard labor.

The ketch had been laden with so many presents of value intended for the Sultan, in addition to the slaves, that she proved a prize well worth saving; and, as she leaked badly when hauled off the rocks, Decatur decided to convoy her into Syracuse for repairs. That night the remainder of the American squadron which had started for Tripoli with a number of chartered Sicilian gunboats and bombards in tow, were compelled by heavy weather to return to the same port.

When Billy Vance, clinging to the parted main sheet of the ketch, realized, by the vessel's being hove to, that his object had been accomplished, he also became conscious of his own imminent peril. With his disguise lost through his involuntary plunge into the sea, his true character was plainly revealed, and would be instantly detected by any one looking over the after rail to see what had become of him. If this discovery were made, he knew that the master of the ketch would not hesitate to shoot him, and could easily do so unseen by the Americans. Therefore, though he was still a very poor swimmer, he decided to take his chances of being picked up by the boat that he could see being lowered from the *Enterprise*, rather than remain in his present perilous

position. So he endeavored to swim to it, and was so nearly drowned in consequence that for some time after being carried aboard the American schooner his life hung in a balance.

When he next opened his eyes they fell on a face bending anxiously over him, that had been so often in his memory during the years of his captivity that he instantly recognized it with a great rush of joy. "Decatur?" he whispered wonderingly.

"Yes, Vance, my dear fellow. It is your old friend Decatur, and thank God you are once more with us. We are wild to hear your story, of course,—but you mustn't try to talk yet. So, go to sleep like a good chap, and in the morning you shall tell us all about it."

"You have got the ketch?" whispered Billy, anxiously.

"Yes, indeed. You can rest easy on that score. We have got her all right, and in the morning you shall see her. Now, not another word."

With this Decatur left the room that Billy might have no further temptation to talk; and the latter with a happy smile on his face wearily closed his eyes. He had not clearly understood, and thought that the "her" whom he was to see in the morning referred to Ruth Dean.

Decatur had intended setting forth with earliest daylight to join the squadron; but ere he could do so, it returned, having been unable to tow its bom-

bards in teeth of the gale now blowing. Consequently, the commander of the *Enterprise* hastened on board the *Constitution* to report to Commodore Preble as soon as the flagship dropped her anchor. He was the more anxious to do this because he held a packet, that, enveloped in waterproof silk, and addressed to the chief officer of the American Mediterranean squadron, had been found on Billy Vance, when his water-soaked garments were removed. The youth had not wakened when Decatur was ready to visit the flagship, and the doctor forbade his being disturbed; so the packet was taken without any knowledge of what it contained.

When the commander of the *Enterprise* was ushered into the presence of his superior officer, he found the latter pacing his cabin floor and evidently greatly agitated.

"Can it be that you have already heard the melancholy news?" began the commodore, abruptly.

"I think not, sir. What is it?" asked Decatur, startled by the other's manner.

"The *Philadelphia* has fallen into the hands of the Bashaw, and her entire company are prisoners in Tripoli."

For a moment Decatur stared incredulous.

"It is true," continued the commodore, "in spite of it's being hard to believe. I got the news direct from the captain of a British cruiser, which sent despatches aboard us yesterday."

“Then, sir,” exclaimed Decatur, “for the honor of the American navy, the *Philadelphia* must be re-taken without delay; and I hereby make application to lead the expedition that shall cut her out.”

CHAPTER XXXV

A COMMODORE AND THREE CAPTAINS VISIT BILLY

COMMODORE PREBLE paused in his walk long enough to seize Decatur's hand and squeeze it warmly in acknowledgment of the latter's brave speech, and braver offer of his own services as leader of a forlorn hope. Then he again resumed his thoughtful pacing, and there was an interval of silence finally broken by the commanding officer, who said:—

“I shall wait a few days before deciding what to do, in the hope of hearing from Bainbridge, whose opinion as to our best course will necessarily carry great weight. Thus, I cannot at this moment promise what you ask. At the same time, my dear Decatur, I shall certainly remember that your application for the post of greatest danger, as well as of greatest honor, takes precedence of all others.

“Thank you, sir,” said Decatur, simply, but with shining eyes. “And, commodore,” he continued, “your reference to Captain Bainbridge reminds me that a packet has fallen into my hands which may contain information concerning him, since it has come direct from Tripoli.”

Here the speaker gave a brief outline of his capture of the *Mastico*, and rescue of one of her company upon whose person the packet in question had been found. "As it is directed to the officer commanding the American Mediterranean squadron," he concluded, "I have brought it unopened to you, and it forms my excuse for making so early a call."

With this Decatur handed the packet to Commodore Preble, who hastily tore open its wrappings. To the surprise and mystification of both men, the contents proved to be but a few sheets of blank paper.

"Strange," murmured the commodore.

"May it not be a communication written in sympathetic ink?" suggested Decatur.

"The very thing!" exclaimed the other. "Orderly, a lighted lamp, quick!"

With ill-suppressed excitement the two men watched the gradual appearance of the written characters as they were revealed by the heat of a flame thus furnished.

"It is Captain Bainbridge's writing," cried Decatur, "for I know it well."

"Yes; and there is his signature," added the commodore, exultingly.

Within half an hour, the entire communication, briefly detailing the loss of the *Philadelphia*, describing her present position, affirming the hopelessness of attempting a recapture, but urging the possibility

that she might be destroyed at her anchorage, and referring to the bearer, Midshipman William Vance, U. S. N., for further details, had been deciphered.

“It would break my heart to destroy that fine ship,” said Decatur.

“It would break mine to leave her in her present disgraceful service,” cried the other.

“Then, sir, may I have the honor of destroying her?”

“By what means? With the *Enterprise*, which is as well known in Tripoli as one of the Bashaw’s own ships; or would you need the entire squadron?”

Decatur smiled as he answered: “My plan would be to take only the Tripolitan ketch that has just fallen into our hands, load her with combustibles, man her with a picked crew of volunteers, and sail for Tripoli; upon reaching there I would be guided by circumstances.”

“That’s not a bad scheme,” rejoined the commodore, reflectively, “though I should say that some supporting force would be needed.”

At this moment another visitor was announced and entered the cabin. He was Lieutenant Charles Stewart of the brig *Siren*, just arrived from Gibraltar.

After saluting and officially reporting the arrival of his vessel, Stewart plunged impulsively into the real business that had prompted this early call, by saying:—

“I have just heard, sir, of the loss of the *Phila-*

adelphia. My men are wild to wipe out the disgrace. So I have come to beg your permission to go to Tripoli with the *Siren* and cut our frigate out on the first dark night. We can do it, sir, and will, if we are only allowed to make the attempt. I will stake my life on that."

Commodore Preble smiled proudly. "It is worth while to command men like these," he murmured half aloud. Then, to the eager young officer who had just spoken, he replied:—

"You are a little late, Mr. Stewart, since I have just promised Mr. Decatur, that, in case any such expedition is planned, he shall lead it. At the same time I thank you most warmly for offering this proof of your patriotism and solicitude for the honor of our glorious service. I will add that, in case an expedition is sent out, and the presence of a supporting vessel is deemed necessary, the *Siren* shall be chosen for that purpose."

While Stewart was murmuring his thanks for this favor a third visitor was announced, and entered hurriedly. He was Lieutenant Richard Somers, commanding the ten-gun schooner *Nautilus*, twenty-three years of age, and the youngest commanding officer in the American navy.

His youthful face, usually quiet and thoughtful, was now flushed with an eager excitement; but it fell at sight of those already with the commodore.

"I had hoped, sir," he began,—"that is, having

just learned of what has happened to the *Philadelphia*, I was about to offer — But, of course, it's no use now, with Decatur and Stewart both ahead of me. I do trust, however, that you will allow me to accompany, as a volunteer, any expedition that is sent to recapture our frigate."

"My dear Somers," replied the commodore, at the same time resting his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder, "there is a time-honored warning against putting all one's eggs into a single basket. My eggs, just at present, are my gallant young captains, whose lives are altogether too precious to be needlessly risked. So, while I heartily appreciate the spirit that prompts your brave offer, I am forced to decline it on account of promises already made to these gentlemen. I will say, however, that when the next emergency arises, I shall not forget that your application for glory is on file."

"Thank you, sir, and I only hope my chance may come soon," rejoined Somers, with a brave effort not to show his present disappointment.

"Now," continued the commodore, "as I am most anxious to question the latest arrival from Tripoli, and understand that he is at present in no condition to come to me, I propose to visit him. Therefore, will you, Mr. Decatur, kindly return to your ship, prepare him for an interview, and signal when Mr. Vance is ready to receive visitors. As for you two gentlemen, I shall be pleased to have you break-

fast here, and afterwards accompany me to the *Enterprise*, since your prompt tenders of service in the present emergency entitle you to take part in whatever consultations may be held concerning it."

In pursuance of this plan the commodore, together with the three young captains who had visited him that morning, were gathered some hours later in the cabin of the *Enterprise*. There also was Billy Vance, still pale and a little shaky, but looking radiantly happy, and clad in a midshipman's uniform, borrowed for the occasion. He was warmly greeted by his old acquaintances, Stewart and Somers, both of whom had been present at the dinner given by Dr. Dean, to introduce him to the navy, and was most kindly welcomed by Commodore Preble.

After a little preliminary conversation the latter said: "Now, Mr. Vance, will you kindly tell us as briefly as possible, how you happened to be in Tripoli and what you have done there, as well as everything that you know concerning the loss and present condition of the *Philadelphia*?"

Of course Billy complied, and was listened to with intense interest by the four officers. He was frequently interrupted by questions, most of which he was able to answer satisfactorily. But when Commodore Preble asked him if it was his opinion that the *Philadelphia* could be cut out from where she lay, by a small force, working under cover of darkness, he promptly answered, "No, sir."

“Why not?”

“Because she is filled with armed men, lies within the radius of fire of one hundred and fifteen heavy guns, is surrounded by a fleet of armed cruisers, and, if moved at all, must be towed by small boats.”

“Do you think she might be destroyed, where she lies, by a party such as I have named?”

“I believe she could, sir.”

“How, in your opinion, could such a party best reach her?”

Billy thought for a moment before answering. Then he said: “I believe, sir, that a native craft, showing but few men on deck, might drift almost alongside without exciting suspicion, especially if some one were on board who could understand and answer the Turkish hails.”

At this answer the commodore and Decatur exchanged significant glances.

“You understand the language, do you not?” asked the former.

“Perfectly, sir.”

“And speak it?”

“Almost as well as a native.”

“Are you sufficiently familiar with the harbor of Tripoli to pilot a light-draught vessel to the *Philadelphia's* present moorings?”

“I am, sir.”

“I suppose you still consider yourself in the naval service of the United States?”

“I do, sir.”

“And so would, of course, yield prompt obedience to any orders given you by a ranking naval officer?”

“Certainly I would, sir.”

“Even if they should require you to accompany a desperate and almost hopeless expedition back to the scene of your recent captivity, with a slim chance of destroying the *Philadelphia*, together with a very great chance of being destroyed at the same time.”

“I would go more gladly than on any other errand I know of.”

“Spoken like the brave lad I believe you to be!” cried Commodore Preble, heartily. “And I am inclined to think that the years of your captivity will prove to have been fully as profitable to your country, as though they had been passed in active service elsewhere. At any rate, I shall so consider them, and will order that they be credited to you as sea service, also that the arrears of back pay as such be made good to you. For the present you may regard yourself as attached to this ship, though always ready for special duty elsewhere. At the same time you will be very careful not to mention to any one that such special service is contemplated.”

“I will remember, sir; and I thank you a thousand times for your kindness,” exclaimed our lad, his face beaming with delight.

“That is all, I think, gentlemen,” said the commodore, rising. “All for the present, I mean, but I shall

call a meeting of commanding officers on the flagship for seven o'clock this evening."

Decatur accompanied his departing guests to the deck, and when he returned to the cabin, found Billy still awaiting him with an eager question on his lips.

"When and where can I see Miss Ruth Dean?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" queried Decatur, looking bewildered. "I noticed that you mentioned her as being in Tripoli, when it is generally believed that she was drowned at sea some years since, and was about to question you further concerning her."

"But she was aboard the ketch!" cried Billy.

"What ketch?"

"The *Mastico*, the one you captured, and you told me yourself that I should see her this morning. Surely nothing has happened to her since then."

"My dear fellow, here is some serious misunderstanding. I am not aware that I made you any such promise; and if I did, I am in no position to fulfil it, since the last time I saw Dr. Dean's daughter was in her own home some years ago. From that time until now I have known nothing of her whereabouts save what you have just told me, nor even that she was still alive."

"She was on the ketch among the slaves being taken to Constantinople," insisted Billy, "for I saw her there. Surely she must have made herself known when the vessel was captured."

“When we finally took possession,” replied Decatur, “the prize was abandoned, so that not a living soul remained on board.”

“May Heaven help her, then, and me!” groaned poor Billy, “since by now she must be past all human aid.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

AGAIN ASSIGNED TO DUTY

WHEN Billy Vance learned all the details of the taking of the *Mastico*, and that Ruth's continued captivity was wholly owing to his own misadventure, his self-accusations and regrets at being still alive were pitiful. He begged to be allowed to return at once to Cape Passaro, and prosecute a search from that point, declaring that if he did not find Ruth he would never return.

"So you would be willing to sacrifice your country's interests to your own private grief," suggested Decatur, gravely.

"But I promised her father to protect her from harm, and swore that I would never escape from Tripoli without her," cried Billy.

"And in both cases you have exhausted every effort to keep your word. That you have failed is in no way your fault, but is wholly due to an accident over which you could exercise no control. It is true that if you had not cut that main sheet, you would not have fallen overboard, and so delayed us in taking possession of the ketch. At the same time had not the *Mastico* lost the use of her mainsail, it is

very doubtful if we should have captured her at all ; for she was certainly outfooting us at that time. Now, let us go to the commodore, lay the case before him, and abide by his decision in the matter. In fact, there is nothing else to be done, for you must remember that you, as well as I, are now under his orders."

Surprised as he was to see Decatur and Midshipman Vance on board the flagship so soon, Commodore Preble listened attentively to their story, and expressed the gravest concern at learning of Ruth Dean's unhappy position. Then his sympathy took the practical form of granting Billy a short leave of absence, and gaining from the king of Sicily an escort of soldiers, in whose company he might explore the neighborhood of Cape Passaro.

So the unhappy fellow started off, determined to discover Ruth's present location and effect her rescue if she were still on the island. "If I find her," he said stoutly, "we will come back together, or not at all."

He was gone a week, and returned at the end of that time, more than ever cast down, since he had traced the fugitives to a small seaport, where he arrived but a few hours after they had sailed for Constantinople in a Maltese vessel flying the British flag.

When Billy finished reporting this state of affairs to Commodore Preble, he added: "And now, sir, I wish to tender my resignation from the service."

“For what reason?”

“That I may work my way to Constantinople, and there strive to fulfil the duty that I have thus far failed to perform.”

“My dear boy,” replied the commodore, kindly, “you must not imagine that I do not appreciate your position, or fail to sympathize with your distress, when I tell you that you would be more helpless in the Turkish capital than you were in Tripoli, and that I cannot spare your services at this critical moment. At the same time I am deeply concerned in the welfare of this American girl and will urge government interference in her behalf. I will also write at once to the British Minister to Turkey, since our own country is not yet represented in that country, begging for his interest in the matter. Further than this, as soon as we have settled our present affair with Tripoli, I will send a ship to the Bosphorus, and you shall accompany it. Does it not seem to you that more may be accomplished by such means than by your unaided efforts?”

“Yes, sir; I suppose so,” answered Billy, doubtfully. “Only I am fearful of the long delay.”

“It will be much shortened by a successful attack on the *Philadelphia*, and in that you can render material aid.”

“Then, sir, I hope the expedition may be undertaken at once.”

“It has been decided upon, and preparations are

being pushed with all rapidity," answered the commodore. "At the same time, it is still being kept a secret, for fear lest rumors concerning it might reach Tripoli."

So Billy Vance, heavy-hearted and impatient, was forced to defer, for a time, all thoughts of rescuing Ruth Dean, and devote himself to the work of preparation on board the *Mastic*. Many were the surmises throughout the squadron as to the destination of the ketch and the service expected of her; but not until she was ready for sailing was the secret divulged. Then, summoning the crew of the *Enterprise* on deck, Lieutenant Decatur explained the nature of the expedition about to be undertaken, dwelling particularly upon its extreme peril, and called for volunteers.

Instantly every man and boy stepped forward. As all could not be taken, sixty-two were selected, to their own intense gratification. To these were joined six officers from the *Enterprise* and six from the *Constitution*.

Then the little ketch, crowded with seventy-five men, and further laden with a great store of combustibles, put to sea, followed by rousing cheers from ship after ship of the squadron, as she slipped swiftly past them. She was accompanied by Lieutenant Stewart's brig, the *Siren*, which was expected to cover the retreat after her tremendous task should be accomplished.

Standing across the Mediterranean, the two vessels sighted the African coast at dusk of the following day, only to be met by a sudden change of wind, that quickly increased to a gale, rendering impossible the attempt they had planned to make that night. They remained off the city until nearly daylight, hoping for the opportunity that did not come, and then, to avoid discovery, ran a few miles to the eastward, where they hove to until the gale should abate.

For the succeeding six days all things seemed conspired against them. They were terribly cramped in their narrow quarters, great seas continually swept the decks, their scanty supply of provisions, only intended for a short cruise, became spoiled, no fires could be lighted, and, on the whole, six more wretched days could hardly be imagined. Still, all hands bore up with uncomplaining cheerfulness, only chafing at their weary delay; and, when the gale finally broke, they were more than ever ready for their desperate venture.

On the evening of the seventh day the two vessels again approached the harbor of Tripoli, and at dusk were within five miles of the city. Everything was now propitious for the attempt; and bidding farewell to the *Siren*, the little ketch stood alone into the harbor. As she was wafted gently along before a light breeze, the form of her consort was soon lost in the gloom; but the lights of the city shone

brightly, and toward these she was directed, with Billy Vance guiding her clear of reefs and shoals.

It was a glorious starlit night, and as they drifted slowly into the inner harbor, an unclouded moon, but little past its full, was rising from the eastern waters. Now they could make out the great bulk of the *Philadelphia*, which, with lights twinkling in every port, lay, fast moored, within musket shot of the Bashaw's castle. On all sides were grinning batteries ready to sweep the harbor with a whirlwind of iron death.

Billy, trembling with nervous excitement, stood beside the quartermaster at the wheel. Decatur leaned in the shadow of a mast close at hand. Half a dozen men in the dress of Maltese sailors occupied the deck with well-assumed listlessness; while the remainder of the crew lay concealed in the shadow of the bulwarks. Every man was armed with cutlass, boarding pike, and pistols, though the use of the last had been strictly forbidden save in an extreme emergency. The little craft was slipping into the very jaws of hell, from which not a man of her company really expected to emerge alive.

“Head straight for the frigate, and foul her at the bow if possible,” whispered Decatur.

“Aye, aye, sir,” growled the quartermaster, while every man held his breath.

Suddenly the oppressive stillness was broken by a sharp challenge from the frigate.

“Who comes?”

“Friends in distress,” answered Billy, promptly, in Arabic. “We come from Malta with a heavy freight of provisions. During the recent gale we were only saved by the mercy of Allah, and at the same time lost our anchors. Now we pray you let us make fast to your mooring chains until we can procure others.”

“It may not be allowed, and you must keep off,” replied the voice, sternly.

“Is not he who speaks the noble Captain Mustapha?” asked Billy, who thought he recognized the voice.

“He is so called. Who are you?”

“Catalano, the pilot,” answered our lad, with quick wit, “and I bring thee a letter, together with gifts from thy brother, the eminent consul at Malta.”

“In that case you may come alongside and deliver them.”

The ketch, looking like a plaything beside the great *Philadelphia*, drifted slowly on until she was within a score of yards, while the Americans, clutching their weapons with a tighter grip, nerved themselves to spring at the word.

Just then, a little off-shore puff threw their sails aback and swung their craft broadside to the frigate’s port battery. A suppressed gasp of consternation came from the crew, but not a man moved. Had the suspicions of the Turks been aroused at that

moment, they could have blown the ketch with all on board out of the water, by a single discharge of their ready guns.

“Ask him if we may carry a line,” whispered Decatur.

Billy made the request, and it was granted.

Walking coolly forward, Decatur ordered four men into a boat. These took the end of a hawser to the frigate’s forechains, where they made it fast. At the same time the Turkish officer, anxious to get his letter, sent one of his own boats with a line, by which he intended to secure the ketch to the frigate’s stern.

With great presence of mind and jabbering in broken Italian, the American sailors in the returning boat politely took this line from the Tripolitans, intimating that they would carry it aboard their vessel.

During this by-play, Billy diverted the attention of the watch officer on board the frigate with a steady stream of conversation. At the same time the line made fast forward was passed over the bows of the ketch and led along her deck, so that the crew could haul on it while still lying in concealment.

By a strong, steady pull the stern drift of the vessel was checked, and she began to move ahead. All at once, while matters were progressing thus favorably, the frigate’s people discovered that the *Mastico*’s anchors were still aboard. At this the Turkish officer sternly demanded of Billy why he had thus

sought to deceive him, and ordered the line from the ketch to be cast off.

Ere this could be done the crew of the little vessel sprang to their feet, pulling like mad to get alongside the frigate while their line was still fast. At sight of them the Turks took the alarm, and the night air rang with their terrified cry of, "Amerikanos! Amerikanos!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE MOST DARING ACT OF THE AGE

So little had the Tripolitans understood the American character up to this time, that they were wholly unprepared for any such desperate attempt as the present. One of those on board the *Philadelphia* had sufficient presence of mind to hack with a knife at the line connecting the ketch with the frigate until it was severed; but all the others ran panic-stricken about the decks, in the wildest confusion.

The Americans, on the other hand, perfectly cool, and knowing exactly what to do, gave a mighty final pull on the hawser, that carried them alongside just as it was cut. Then the ketch was instantly secured, and Decatur, sword in hand, calling on his men to follow, sprang into the frigate's main chains. Billy Vance was close at his heels, and after them swarmed the eager crew. Over the bulwarks they clambered, and into the open ports, cutting down their bewildered enemies and driving them to the starboard side, where they huddled in abject terror like so many sheep.

Thus the quarterdeck was quickly cleared, and from it the Americans charged forward in a compact body, while the terrified Tripolitans leaped by scores

and hundreds into the sea, or fled to the deepest parts of the ship. Leaving a dozen of his men to hold the deck, Decatur led the others below, where for a few minutes a sharp resistance was encountered, and some twenty of the Turks were killed. The struggle was, however, so quickly ended, that in less than ten minutes after the first alarm the great ship was in undisputed possession of the Americans, and of the hundreds who so lately occupied it, not one was to be seen alive. At the same time the victors had not lost a man, and only a few slight wounds served as reminders of their heroic achievement.

Now the prepared combustibles were rapidly passed up from the ketch, and the firing parties under their assigned leaders hastened to their appointed stations. Billy Vance had been detailed to accompany Midshipman Morris and eight men into the very hold of the ship, where they were to fire the cockpit and after storeroom. So swiftly was the work accomplished, that before this little party could get their own material ignited, the wardroom above them was ablaze, and the hatchway by which they had descended was filled with roaring flames. Thus cut off, they rushed blindly forward, where they finally found an avenue of escape still open.

As they gained the deck, tongues of flame were leaping from ports and hatches in every direction, and Decatur, seeing that the melancholy task of

destruction had been thoroughly carried out, ordered his men back to the ketch. Nor had they a moment to spare, for the flames were already hot in their faces, and their gallant leader, remaining until he had seen every other safely from the frigate, was forced to make a flying leap into the *Mastico's* main rigging. Only twenty-five minutes had elapsed since he had given the command to board, and the great deed was accomplished. Now it only remained to make good their escape from the harbor.

Could they do this? There was not a breath of air to fill their sails, and so fierce was the conflagration that their own vessel was in imminent danger of being consumed. From every part of the frigate eager flames were reaching for them. Fiery tongues licked their woodwork, and even penetrated to the little cabin, where their entire stock of ammunition lay beneath a tarpaulin.

Desperately the Americans shoved with pole and sweep against the glowing side of the frigate. The bows of the ketch swung off, and she swung around, but her stern still hung so close to the burning ship that her main yard fouled its quarter-gallery. Something held her; and it was Billy Vance who dashed through the eddying smoke to discover that it was the line brought out by the Tripolitans and forgotten until that moment. A few savage blows from his cutlass severed it, and the ketch slowly drifted clear.



THE FRIGATE WAS A SOLID MASS OF FLAMES THAT LIGHTED
MILES OF HER SURROUNDINGS.



By this time the alarm had spread to all parts of the harbor, and throughout the city. Lights twinkled in the batteries. Drums were beaten and trumpets blared in every direction. The frigate was a solid mass of flames that lighted miles of her surroundings, and in the very brightest of the glow lay the intrepid little ketch that had created all the turmoil. Her crew were pulling at their sweeps with desperate energy; and, as she moved slowly across the molten surface of the harbor, thousands of eyes were focussed upon her.

The Bashaw saw her from his castle, and stamped with impotent rage. The populace of the city, crowding their housetops, saw and cursed her. Captain Bainbridge and his fellow-captives saw her, and while some wept at the destruction of their gallant frigate, all cheered their heroic countrymen until their guards rushed in and silenced them with blows. Above all, the gunboats saw her and opened fire. Then the batteries began to thunder, and their screaming shot raised gleaming columns of water on all sides of the brave little craft. But the excited gunners fired without aim; the guns themselves were stationary and could not be trained on a moving object; so the *Mastico*, sweeping steadily forward, at length passed out of range without injury.

As she reached a place of safety, and her perspiring crew, smoke-begrimed and breathless, rested on their oars, they could not at first realize what they

had done. For a moment they gazed at each other, and at the roaring mass of flame behind them, with incredulous eyes. Then it came to them. They were still alive, and they were heroes. They had accomplished their well-nigh hopeless undertaking with chances of a thousand to one against their success, and had performed a deed that would go on glorious record throughout the world. As the wonderful truth burst upon them, they became delirious with joy. They shouted and yelled, laughed and cried, danced and hugged each other. The officers rushed at Decatur to seize his hands and congratulate him. Then they slapped each other on the back, told each other what fine fellows they were, and acted almost as extravagantly as the men.

While they were in the midst of this frantic rejoicing, two boats filled with armed men dashed alongside with jubilant shouts. They were from the *Siren*, come to cover the retreat, and amid a whirlwind of eager questions and vague answers, the rejoicings began again with redoubled fervor.

Not a shot had been fired by the Americans. Not a man was lost, and only one prisoner had been taken. It had been ordered that none should be made; but Billy Vance had disobeyed the order, and was now responsible for the only Tripolitan aboard the ketch.

Wounded and bewildered, this man had tumbled from a blazing port, and swam directly for the

Mastico as she drifted clear. Orville Swain grimly awaited him with a drawn cutlass. It was already lifted for the fatal blow, when Billy Vance caught sight of the swimmer's agonized face and sprang in front of the man from Nantucket. "Don't kill him!" he implored. "Let him come aboard. He is a friend who once saved my life. I will make it all right with the captain."

So Orville Swain reluctantly laid aside his cutlass to help get the swimmer on deck. And thus Billy was able to cancel his obligation to the officer of the harbor guard, who had let Ruth and him go free nearly a year before.

After meeting with the boats from the *Siren*, Decatur waited awhile longer to gaze upon the magnificent spectacle of the burning frigate. By this time, the flames had climbed by shrouds and rigging to the very mastheads, from which they streamed like lurid banners. The tarred ropes were converted into fiery serpents, writhing and twisting as though in mortal pain. Blazing tar and grease dropped into the water and spread over its surface until the flaming ship rode on a sea of flame. Her open ports were lighted with fierce battle lanterns, and from them boomed the solemn note of minute guns, as one after another her cannon became heated by the advancing flames. The Tripolitan gunboats hastily withdrew beyond range of this weird bombardment, and even the Bashaw was driven from

his turret by one of these unaimed shots that flew above his head. Beneath the dense cloud of smoke from the burning frigate the white-walled city, with its mosques, domes, slender minarets, and crowded housetops, was clearly visible to the Americans, and formed a wonderful background for the thrilling picture.

Suddenly the climax of awful splendor was reached in a terrific explosion, that shook the startled city to its foundations. The burning frigate was rent into fragments, and lost to mortal sight forever in the appalling darkness that instantly succeeded the great blinding glare of light.

A feeling of deep sadness had succeeded the frenzied joy of the Americans, as they gazed upon the destruction of the noble ship that had so recently been their pride and delight; and now that all was over, they turned quietly away as though from the grave of a dear friend. As they once more joined company with the *Siren*, there was a heartfelt interchange of congratulations, but it was tinged with soberness, by the memory of the grandly melancholy sight they had just witnessed.

So it was not until the two vessels returned to the harbor of Syracuse, with the daring little ketch decked in flags from masthead to water-line, leading the way, that a wild rejoicing again broke forth. Now it was unrestrained. The news of success had been proclaimed to the anxious watchers, by the flut-

tering flags of the approaching ships; and, as they sailed proudly through the American fleet to where the stately *Constitution* awaited them, great guns boomed forth a welcome, bands played soul-stirring airs, colors were dipped, and crew after crew yelled themselves into speechlessness with cheering their returned heroes.

In his impatience to hear the thrilling story, Commodore Preble ordered out his twelve-oared barge, and was pulled alongside the ketch, even before her anchor was dropped. Then, on the very deck that had witnessed the glorious deed, and surrounded by the men who had performed it, he heard the marvellous tale. When it was finished, tears of joyful gratitude glistened in the eyes of the stern sailor, and grasping Decatur's hand, he exclaimed:—

“It is the most daring act of the age, and I thank God for giving to my country the men who could carry it to completion. By it the name of Decatur has gained a renown that will last as long as the English tongue is spoken. As for this brave little ship, she also must be remembered, but not under her present name; for hereafter she shall be called *Intrepid*.”

Before returning to the flagship, where all the captains of the squadron were to dine with him that night, the commodore shook hands with every officer on the *Intrepid*; and with uncovered head publicly thanked her crew for their gallantry and

devoted patriotism. In concluding his remarks, he said:—

“Now that you Intrepids have shown the way into Tripoli harbor, I promise that every ship under my command shall quickly follow where you have led.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BILLY CAPTURES A PRIZE

WHILE the destruction of the *Philadelphia* was a severe blow to the Bashaw of Tripoli, it by no means crippled his strength, nor rendered him less confident of his ability to beat back the American ships should they venture within reach of his powerful batteries. At the same time, he was so enraged and frightened by the daring of Decatur's exploit that he began to treat his captives with the utmost severity. He had discovered that the Americans were anything but cowards, and fearing lest the crew of the *Philadelphia*, stimulated by the glorious example of their countrymen, should plan some equally desperate effort, he deprived them of all liberty, and forbade any communication between officers and men. Then he awaited with confidence the coming of the American squadron.

Nor had he long to wait before he was aroused one fine morning by news that the enemy was off the entrance to his harbor. Hastening to his favorite post of observation, he was not only able to see the on-coming squadron, but to estimate its strength. Proudly leading the way was the frigate *Constellation*,

towing two bombards. Then came six brigs and schooners, each having in tow a gunboat containing thirty-five men. One thousand and sixty Americans had thus come to fight against twenty-five thousand Tripolitan troops, protected by strong fortifications and further provided with a fleet of nineteen gunboats, besides a score of galleys, feluccas, and other armed craft.

As fourteen gunboats formed the outer line of defence, being stationed five at one entrance and nine at the other, they must first be driven in, so Decatur was sent with the six American gunboats to attack the nine guarding the eastern entrance.

These gunboats were clumsy, flat-bottomed affairs, each mounting but a single twenty-four-pounder in the bows, and originally intended only for harbor defence. They were sluggish under sail and heavy to row, their only qualifications for their present service being their stability and light draught. Those under Decatur were compelled to beat up to the entrance, and so awkward were they to handle that only three of them succeeded in weathering the point behind which the Tripolitans were sheltered. One of these, however, known as gunboat No. 4, held Decatur, and without pausing to consider that the odds against him were three to one, he ordered the others to follow, and dashed forward.

At his own request Billy Vance had been assigned to gunboat No. 4, and at this moment he stood beside

the man who, to his mind, was the most heroic and splendid of human beings. In our lad's bearing there was now nothing of nervousness nor apprehension; for he was convinced that, led by Decatur, no enterprise was too desperate to be successfully undertaken.

A bag containing a thousand musket balls had been rammed down the black throat of the twenty-four-pounder; and, in spite of the iron hail that greeted the appearance of the Americans, they reserved their fire until the last minute. Then, under cover of its terrible discharge, the nearest Tripolitan was laid alongside, and Decatur, close followed by a score of his men, leaped aboard.

After a single minute of savage conflict the enemy gave way and fled aft. A broad open hatchway with a narrow passage along either side now separated the contestants. For a moment they glared at each other across the opening; then Decatur sprang along one side, while Billy Vance took the other, with their eager men close at their heels. So fierce was their rush that such of the Turks as were not instantly cut down leaped into the sea, and the ship was gained. That its crew had not fought more vigorously was owing to the loss of their leader, who was found dead, pierced with a score of bullets from that first murderous discharge of the long gun.

Hauling down the crescent flag and returning to his own boat, Decatur began to tow his prize to a place

of safety; but he had hardly started before a message was brought that caused him to utter a cry of anguish. His favorite brother, James, had just been murdered by treachery, and, casting his prize adrift, Decatur again rushed into the thick of the fray to avenge the cowardly act.

James Decatur, in command of gunboat No. 2, had obeyed his brother's orders to reserve the fire of his long gun until the last moment. Then it had been delivered with such deadly effect that the craft against which it was directed instantly lowered her flag in token of surrender. As James Decatur stepped aboard to take possession, and was holding out his hand for its commander's sword, the Turk whipped out a pistol and shot him dead.

During the confusion that followed the Tripolitans manned their sweeps and took to flight. Two minutes later gunboat No. 4 was in hot pursuit, with its crew so stimulated by rage that they were soon alongside, and boarding under fire from their heavy gun. Decatur at once sought the Turkish commander, who was a powerful man of great size, armed with a boarding-pike, and they were instantly engaged in mortal conflict. With his first blow the Turk succeeded in snapping off Decatur's sword close to the hilt. Then he in turn made a savage thrust with his boarding-pike, which the other partially warded, at the expense of ugly wounds in both arms. Ere it could be repeated he dashed in, clinched with his big antagonist,

and in another moment both fell heavily to the deck, but with the American underneath.

Almost as they fell, the contestants were buried beneath a struggling mass of their followers, who had rushed to their assistance. The mêlée lasted but a minute; and when the Americans had pulled aside the bodies of those whom they had slain, they found their beloved commander still alive, but with his adversary lying dead beside him, shot through the heart. That ended the fight; for the moment the surviving Tripolitans realized that they were without a leader they leaped into the sea.

By this time three of the Bashaw's gunboats had been captured, three sunk, and the others driven to the protection of their batteries. While this gunboat fight was in progress the *Constitution*, standing boldly into the harbor, silenced battery after battery, and threw some fifty shot into the city, from which the populace fled in terror. Even the Bashaw, who had invited the ladies of his harem to a terrace from which he had promised they should witness the complete destruction of the American ships, was forced to take refuge in a bomb-proof chamber, where he remained until the bombardment ceased. Had the Americans been strong enough to effect a landing in the face of twenty-five thousand troops, they would have ended the war then and there; but as they were not, they drew off toward evening, well pleased with their day's work.

That night Billy Vance was placed in charge of a patrol boat containing six sailors and four marines. He was stationed close under the rocks of the eastern entrance, and ordered to signal with a rocket if any vessel should attempt to leave the harbor.

Our lad was weary after the exhausting work of the day, and as a reaction from its intense excitement was in a very thoughtful frame of mind. Having secured a good berth for his boat in a place of deep shadow, from which he could command a wide outlook without being observed, and enjoined strict silence upon his men, the young officer pulled his watch-cloak about him and sat in musing reverie.

A glow of light across the harbor marked the cruel city in which he had been held prisoner for so long. He wondered if Sidi were alive and in it at that moment. But chiefly his thoughts were with Ruth Dean. What had become of her? Should he ever see her again? Had he been faithful to his trust in regard to her, or could he have done more? What a dear girl she was, and how he longed to fly to her aid. He could go when Tripoli was reduced, for so the commodore had promised. Now he was conscious that this thought had been with him throughout the day and had nerved his arm through all the savage fighting. Why couldn't they have followed up their victory by landing and occupying the city? Then he would be free to start in search of Ruth. Oh, this weary delay, would it never end?

Just here, the man who sat nearest touched his arm and pointed. Billy had kept his face toward the city, since he had been ordered not to let any vessel pass *out* of the harbor. Now, turning quickly, he saw a vessel close at hand, attempting to enter it. She moved almost without a ripple and showed no lights. What should he do? It was too late to give a warning signal. How would Decatur act under the circumstances? He thought he knew, and instantly determined to do the same.

“Steady, men!” he whispered. “We must capture that schooner no matter how strong she is, and we can do it with a sudden dash. So have your weapons ready, and out with your oars. Softly! Now, give way, all together—and pull! Pull for all you are worth!”

Out from the blackness leaped the boat, and so close was the schooner that only a single startled cry came from her deck before the Americans were tumbling over her rail. A knot of men forward and another aft were overpowered almost before they could strike a blow; and, in less than five minutes, Billy Vance found himself in full possession of the stranger craft, which he had already caused to be put about and headed toward the American ships.

Now he began to inquire as to her character and, to his surprise, found her to be a French privateer carrying a crew of thirty men. Her captain more-

over claimed to be ignorant that the Americans were blockading Tripoli.

"I believed it to be an open port and came for a little trade with the Bashaw," he whined.

"In what did you propose to trade?" asked Billy.

"Slaves. Female slaves, young and very beautiful. I capture an English ship bound for Turkey, and find them on board. What can I do? I cannot kill them. I cannot sell them in Europe. I have the idea. I will offer them to the Bashaw. If he wants them not, then to the Dey of Algiers. So I shall make the expenses of my voyage. Now—"

Billy had listened impatiently. "Show me these slaves," he interrupted sharply. "Quick! I am in a hurry!"

There was no mistaking the tone of the young man's voice nor the ominous click of the pistol held in his right hand.

The captain shrugged his shoulders and led the way into the cabin, which had been given up to his captives and their attendants. There he lighted a lamp, and, as he did so, the young American called out:—

"Is Ruth Dean here?"

A great cry of wondrous joy came in answer. A white-shrouded figure sprang from a huddled group, and, in another moment, the dear girl, whom Billy Vance had feared was lost to him forever, was once more clasped in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ONE DISAPPOINTMENT FOLLOWS ANOTHER

THERE was no time to ask any one of the thousand eager questions that sprang to the lips of the two thus strangely reunited; for Billy must at once regain the deck, and Ruth should go with him. Not another minute should she remain among the slaves of the Bashaw. So the jubilant young fellow, happier even than on the long-ago day when he first listened to the parchment rustle of his commission, led the girl whom he loved out from the stifling atmosphere of slavery.

The night signal of "a prize" was already displayed in the schooner's rigging, and the young people had barely reached her deck when the *Enterprise* bore down on the privateer, hailing to know what had happened. As soon as the situation was explained, an officer with a prize crew was sent on board; Ruth and a black girl, whom she pointed out as her personal attendant, were transferred to the American schooner, and Billy Vance, his ears tingling with compliments on the prompt bravery of his action, was ordered back to his station.

On the following morning Ruth was visited by the commodore, who was charmed with the girl's beauty and the quiet dignity with which she bore her embarrassing position. After chatting with her for half an hour, he said:—

“I have decided to send Mr. Vance's prize into Tripoli as a cartel to carry our wounded prisoners. At the same time I can think of nothing better to do with the olive-complexioned ladies who are on board than to restore them to their native land. Can you suggest any more satisfactory arrangement?”

“I am sure that nothing would please them better,” replied Ruth.

“As for yourself,” continued Commodore Preble, “it being necessary to send a vessel to Malta with despatches and for water, the *Enterprise*, since you are her guest, shall be assigned to that duty this very day. At Malta you will find an American consul, whose charming wife will take good care of you until one of our frigates is ready to offer you a passage to the United States.”

Having made these arrangements, the commodore took his leave, and two hours later the gallant little *Enterprise* sailed away for Malta.

Decatur remained behind to command the gun-boat flotilla; but Billy Vance, to his great delight, was allowed to accompany the schooner. He was, however, awfully disappointed during the short voyage, which occupied but twenty-four hours, not to

find an opportunity for a private conversation with Ruth. She was ready enough to talk and tell of her experiences to the officers in general, including "Mr. Vance," as she studiously called Billy; but always had some ready excuse to avoid meeting him alone. Of course when she called him "Mr. Vance," he was obliged to address her as "Miss Dean," and by the time they reached Malta it really seemed as though a coolness existed between them. Then she was whisked off to the residence of the American consul, and the next day, when Billy called to bid her good-bye, since the *Enterprise* was again ready to sail, some hours sooner than had been expected, she was out driving with the consul's wife, so the poor fellow could only leave a hastily scribbled note of farewell, and return to his ship with a very heavy heart.

When the *Enterprise* once more reached Tripoli, she found a second engagement in progress. It was between the American gunboats and the shore batteries, since the Tripolitan flotilla, cowed by their recent experience, could not be induced to venture out, and an unfavorable wind forbade the *Constitution* from getting within range. During this artillery duel the Americans suffered severe loss, and one of their gunboats was blown up by a hot shot that penetrated its after magazine.

As they drew out from this long-range battle, they were joined by the frigate *John Adams*, just from the

United States, with news of the promotion of Decatur to a captaincy. She also reported four more American frigates as on their way to the Mediterranean.

Without waiting for these, Commodore Preble continued to bombard the forts and city whenever the weather would permit; but subject to long intervals of delay from gales which swept the coast with unusual severity during that summer.

All this time the pirate fleet of gunboat cruisers and galleys, which the Americans were particularly anxious to destroy, refused to leave their safe moorings under the heavy guns of the castle. Commodore Preble became so impatient at the futility of his efforts to break up this fleet, that when Lieutenant Somers entered his cabin one day with a plan for their destruction, he was given a ready hearing.

“I propose, sir,” said the young man, “to have the ketch *Intrepid* converted into a floating mine, run into the very midst of the Tripolitan fleet on the first favorable night, and there exploded. They are so crowded together that, if the plan can be carried out, it will ensure the loss or serious injury of every vessel.”

“Including the ketch,” remarked the commodore, dryly.

“Of course.”

“And every man on board?”

“I hope not, sir, since we might escape in small boats after firing the train.”

“Do you honestly believe there would be one chance in ten thousand of so escaping?”

“No, sir; I do not.”

“How, then, could I ask men to deliberately throw away their lives in so foolhardy a venture, or detail an officer to command such an expedition?”

“Every officer in the squadron will apply for the honor, sir; but my application is already in, and I have your promise.”

“Somers, I can’t spare you.”

“Can you spare those pirate craft to ravage American shipping, to murder and make slaves of American seamen? Besides, my chance of coming back would be as good as was Decatur’s, and he did not lose a man.”

For an hour longer the two officers discussed this grave question; but the younger pleaded so strongly in favor of his scheme, that he finally gained a reluctant consent to carry it out. When he at length issued from the cabin, Somers’ face was radiant. He had been given permission to win immortality.

The fitting of the ketch for her terrible mission was at once begun, by the building in her hold of a room sided with heavy planking. Into this was poured one hundred barrels of gunpowder, while immediately above it were placed some scores of loaded shells and a vast quantity of scrap iron. A train of powder led from this magazine to the cabin, which was filled with combustibles.

When all was in readiness, and the project was announced, hundreds of eager volunteers begged leave to accompany the expedition; and when ten men were chosen, their disappointed fellows regarded them as the most fortunate of mortals.

Billy Vance paid a private visit to the *Nautilus*, to urge his own claims to be taken along.

"It's of no use, my dear fellow," said Somers, smiling; "I can't break the rule, even in your case. You know that every man whom Decatur led to glory is barred from this trip."

"But think what I suffered over there, and what a score I have to pay."

"Yes, I know."

"And I can speak Arabic like a native."

"There won't be any talking this time."

"Oh, Somers! can't I go?"

"No, Vance, you can't."

"Then get me transferred to the *Nautilus*, that I may accompany you as long as possible."

"I will do that with pleasure."

So it happened that, a few nights later, the *Intrepid* with Richard Somers in command, Henry Wadsworth first officer, and Joseph Israel second, stood in before a favoring breeze, and headed for the northern entrance to Tripoli harbor. Somers' own schooner the *Nautilus*, the brigs *Argus* and *Siren*, and the schooner *Vixen* accompanied her to the entrance of the narrow, rock-bound channel.

There they dropped anchor to await the returning boats, and the brave little ketch, as once before, advanced alone into the very jaws of death. A light mist hung above the water, and in this she was quickly shrouded, though long after she had disappeared, every eye was still strained in the hope of gaining one more glimpse of her shadowy form.

When it was certain that they could no longer make her out, the watchers listened with loudly beating hearts and such intense anxiety that it amounted to physical pain. They started nervously at every ripple of water alongside ; while in the chafing of a cable in its hawse they heard the sound of muffled oars.

Suddenly the tense silence was broken by a cannon shot. Then came a rapid discharge of light artillery like the long roll of drums ; and in another minute the heavy guns of the shore batteries were roaring forth their notes of alarm.

The Americans listened with dismay to these proofs that the ketch had been discovered, and trembled for the fate of her gallant crew. The *Nautilus* lay nearest to the passage, and Billy Vance had watched the little vessel through a night-glass long after she had been lost to unaided vision. Now, as he still gazed in the same direction, he saw a light move swiftly as though it were a lantern carried along a deck, pause for an instant, and then drop out of sight.

A moment later there came an awful blinding glare of light, and the heavens were rent by an explosion that caused the anchored ships to quiver from keel to truck. A vast sheet of flame was hurled skyward, the air was filled with bursting shells, and then everything was again shrouded in awful blackness. At the same moment the Tripolitan guns ceased their fire, and the recent clamor was succeeded by an appalling silence.

That was all. Until daylight the American ships cruised back and forth, hoping to pick up a boat or a swimmer; but none came. Nor has it ever since been known how Richard Somers and his little band of heroes met their fate. Certain it is that death was never faced by braver men.

CHAPTER XL

A GIFT FROM SIDI, SON OF MOUSSA

As though this glorious but disastrous attempt of the Americans to destroy the pirate fleet was a signal, the autumnal gales that annually sweep the African coast set in with such fury the very next day that all present efforts for the reduction of Tripoli must be abandoned. So the *Constitution* with two schooners was left to maintain a blockade during the winter, while the remainder of the squadron, with bombards and gunboats in tow, sailed for Syracuse. On their way, the *Enterprise* touched at Malta to offer Ruth Dean passage to the United States in the frigate *John Adams*, which was homeward bound.

Billy Vance had eagerly anticipated this opportunity of again meeting the girl, who still wore his half of the silver token, but, to his intense disappointment, she was gone. An American ship had touched at Malta two days after Ruth's arrival there, and she, together with the consul's wife, had sailed in it for New York.

Late in the following spring a powerful reënforcement of four fine frigates arrived in the Med-

iterranean. These brought an immense amount of mail for the American squadron, and Billy received the first letters that had come to him since leaving his own country. One was from Dr. Dean telling of Ruth's safe home-coming, and filled with gratitude toward the young officer who had watched over and finally rescued his dear girl. There was also a proud, loving letter from Emily, one filled with quaint, seaman-like advice from Martin Quarterman, and a very sad one from Mrs. Vance, telling of many embarrassments that threatened to swallow up Bonny Eagle and leave them homeless.

"If you would only come back, my dear boy, and marry Ruth Dean," this letter concluded, "the home of your fathers could be saved, since the Doctor is immensely wealthy, and Ruth is his only child."

"As if I would marry for money, even to save my home!" thought Billy, with flashing eyes.

An official-looking document that had been left to the last contained the commission of William Nicholas Vance as lieutenant in the United States navy, and an accompanying letter stated that it was tendered in recognition of gallant and meritorious service as reported by Commodore Edward Preble.

"A pretty jumble of good and bad news," soliloquized Billy. "I am promoted—that's good. I am so poor that even my home is to be taken from me—that's bad. Ruth has reached home in safety

— that's very good. She is so wealthy that I must never think of her again unless I wish to be considered a fortune-hunter — that's the worst of all."

"Good news, gentlemen! good news!" cried the cheery voice of Captain Stephen Decatur, who at that moment honored with his presence the wardroom of the *Constitution*, of which he was in command, and to which Billy was now attached. "The squadron is ordered to sail at once for Tripoli, and if we don't bring the Bashaw to terms this time, then I'm no prophet."

The men in the wardroom had dropped their letters, and sprung to their feet with a salute as their captain entered. Now they gave him a hearty cheer for his news, and the bustle of preparation was instantly begun.

Not long after that, the august ruler of Tripoli was thrown into a state of nervous trepidation by the appearance off his port of the largest fleet of battle ships he had ever seen. Five stately frigates, two brigs, three schooners, and a sloop, besides a score of gunboats, and bomb-vessels. For three years his principal city had been blockaded, and his ships had been unable to cruise for prizes. Now his treasury was running low, his troops were unpaid, and his people were starving. Even the support of his three hundred and odd prisoners was becoming a serious burden; and, instead of paying ransom money for them, these pig-headed Americans were redoubling

their efforts for his destruction. Evidently something must be done that had not been thought of.

"Will Lieutenant Vance report immediately on board the flagship?"

Such was the order Billy received on the second day after the fleet reached Tripoli.

When he had obeyed it, and entered the cabin of the commanding officer, he found there assembled several American captains and an imposing array of Tripolitan officials, among whom he recognized the Bashaw's Prime Minister.

"These gentlemen have come to negotiate a treaty of peace, Mr. Vance," said the commodore, "and I desire that you act as interpreter between them and us."

"Very good, sir."

Within an hour the treaty had been arranged and signed. The American prisoners were to be set free that very day, and never again would the Bashaw of Tripoli demand tribute from the United States or allow his pirate corsairs to seize an American ship. With every demand granted, Somers and his men had not given their lives in vain.

Just before sunset the flotilla of boats sent ashore for Bainbridge, Porter, and the crew of the *Philadelphia* began to return, laden to the gunwales with happiness and eager anticipation. Already the released prisoners had been billeted to the several ships, and, as they once more set foot on sturdy American

decks, their faces, white and wan with nineteen months of imprisonment, streamed with tears of joy.

On board the *Constitution* the yards were manned, the full marine guard was drawn up in line, and the officers of the ship clustered bareheaded about the gangway to give honorable welcome to their returning comrades. Some of these wore ragged uniforms, others were clad in Turkish costume; and to meet one of these latter, an officer in a lieutenant's uniform sprang forward with outstretched hands.

“Biddle, my dear fellow!”

“Vance Effendi! by the beard of the Prophet, and togged out as a Yankee luff! Is it really you, Billy, old man, or am I still dreaming a dream of the Arabian Nights? You know that blooming old acting assistant sawbones of yours reported you as gathered to the fathers long ago, and claimed to reign in your stead.”

“Oh, Jim! It is so good to see you again, and even your nonsense is better worth hearing than some men’s wisdom. But it was hard to recognize you in that costume.”

“Rather a rum disguise, isn’t it? But it serves to cover up what is left of me. Say, Billy,” added the irrepressible reefer, “don’t you suppose you could break out a ton or so of cold prog down in the mess-room, just as a sort of lunch between meals? It doesn’t seem as though I had eaten anything for about a year.”

There was not only cold prog, but hot prog in many forms and generous abundance served at every mess-table of the American squadron that night, until between feasting and merrymaking the released captives could begin to look back on their recent bitter experience as only a troubled dream.

In the morning the Tripolitan batteries saluted the stars and stripes as they were run to every mast-head of the flagship, the squadron saluted the Bashaw's castle, and the reign of peace was begun.

That very day Decatur summoned Billy to his cabin, and said:—

“Mr. Vance, it is decided to send the *Enterprise* home with news of the treaty, and I am allowed to select the officer who shall command her. Which one of our lieutenants, in your opinion, best deserves this honor?”

Billy's cheeks flushed, and a great hope leaped into his heart as he answered:—

“I should say, sir, that either Lieutenants Reed, Dent, Gordon, or McDonough would carry her in safety.”

“I have no doubt they would,” laughed Decatur. “And since you have mentioned all but one of the mess, how do you think Lieutenant Vance would fill the position?”

“I, sir! Do you really mean that you are thinking of conferring so great an honor on me?”

“I really do, my dear fellow; for you have bravely



IN ITS STERN SHEETS WERE SEATED TWO OFFICERS, RUDDY, BRONZED
AND PLEASANT TO LOOK UPON.

won the billet; and, with all my heart, do I congratulate you upon your good fortune. Your instructions are to take command at once, be ready to leave at daybreak, proceed directly to New York, forward your despatches from there by special post, and await orders from the department. If in the mean time you should avail yourself of the opportunity when so near home to finish out your unexpired leave of absence, I am inclined to think you will be permitted to do so. Now make haste, and get out of these pirate waters as quickly as possible. Good-bye. May God bless you and give you a safe voyage!"

Two months later the saucy *Enterprise* dropped anchor off the Battery in New York harbor, receiving and returning a salute from its guns as she did so. Immediately afterwards a captain's gig shot out from her side and was pulled smartly for the landing. In its stern sheets were seated two officers, ruddy, bronzed, and pleasant to look upon in the sturdy strength of their young manhood. One of them was the commander of the trim vessel they had just left, while the other was his dearest friend and acting first lieutenant.

"Biddle," quoth the former, gazing rapturously at the nearing land, "I once said that if I could only set foot on American soil again, I should feel like dropping on my knees and kissing it, and I almost feel as though I could do so at this moment."

"Kiss it!" cried Biddle. "I could eat it, and after the amount of dirt I did eat in that beastly prison, I know it would taste good."

"Well, here we are at last, thank God, home from a four years' cruise, and that is a sadly long time to be exiled from one's own country. Now, my dear boy, hurry on to Washington as quickly as possible with the despatches, and don't stop any longer in Philadelphia on your way back than you can help; for, you know, I am counting on a visit from you at Bonny Eagle."

"Aye, aye, sir!" laughed Biddle. "At the same time I shall expect to see you in Philadelphia long before you see me in these parts again."

So they parted, Midshipman Biddle hurrying southward with the glad tidings that gained him his promotion, and Lieutenant Vance accompanied by a negro servant, whom he addressed as "Dolphus," posting into Westchester.

As he neared Bonny Eagle, Billy alighted from his chaise, sent it ahead with Dolphus and his luggage, and began to climb the little eminence that in his boyish days he had named "Maintop."

When close to the summit, he noticed for the first time that it was occupied by an old man and a young lady, who were intently watching his movements. Billy recognized the old man in an instant, but could not recall that he had ever before seen his fair companion. Lifting his cap to her, he was about to

speak, when the old man stumped forward, and pulling at his forelock, said:—

“ Seeing as you are a naval officer, sir, and I being an old sea-dog myself, I makes free — ”

“ It’s a bad habit, Martin, and I would try to out-grow it if I were you,” interrupted Billy, laughing, and holding out his hand.

Ere the astonished mariner could reply, a girlish figure darted past him, and, with a cry of joy that was almost a sob, flung her arms about the neck of the young lieutenant.

“ Billy! Billy Vance! My own dear brother! Didn’t you know your own little sister Emily? Oh, I am so happy! And we will never, never let you go again.”

After old Martin had hobbled away to proclaim the great news and find Dolphus, leaving the long-separated brother and sister to an uninterrupted talk, Emily suddenly said:—

“ Only think, Billy, our dear Bonny Eagle is to be sold next week, and you never can guess who is going to buy it.”

“ Then I shan’t try. Who is the lucky man?”

“ Dr. Dean of Philadelphia, and Ruth has just been here making me a visit. She’ll be awfully disappointed when she learns that she might have seen you by waiting a single day longer. But you will go and see them, of course.”

“ I hardly think I shall find time.”

“Why, brother! I thought you were fond of her.”

“I was.”

“And she thinks everything of you. She almost told me so.”

“She didn’t show it the last time we met.”

“What a goose you are! Didn’t you understand? She told me all about that, too. Do you remember something she said to you that dreadful night in the boat, when you two tried to escape from Tripoli?”

“I am not likely to forget it.”

“Well, that was the trouble. You see when she said that she never expected to see you again; and afterwards she was so dreadfully embarrassed for fear you would remember it that she didn’t know what to do. She is a dear, sweet, splendid girl, and she loves you. There! Now I’ve told, and I promised not to; but I don’t care — ”

“All the same,” rejoined the young man, bitterly, “there can never be anything between her and me other than a sincere friendship, since she is the daughter of a very wealthy man, while I am only a poverty-stricken sailor.”

Ere Emily could reply, Mrs. Vance appeared on the scene, with a warm welcome home for her stepson, and the three went together to the house.

When Billy’s luggage was opened, of all the strange things he had to show, none so interested Emily as the quaint old medicine chest that had played so important a part during his captivity.

While she was examining it and questioning him about it, she drew forth a small package and asked him what it contained.

“Pills,” replied Billy, “and I have only kept it because it was put there by Sidi. He must have made some mistake concerning it, for he said it was quite valuable. Afterwards I tried to return it to his father, but the old man insisted that I should keep it as a memento of his son. When I opened it a little later, I found only a number of pills, such as Sidi was in the habit of making up under my direction.”

By this time Emily had opened the packet, and a portion of its contents fell to the stone floor of the porch in which they were sitting. As the girl stooped to pick them up, a glitter in one of the queer-looking pills caught her eye. In another moment she had rubbed off its brown outer coating.

“Oh, brother!” she gasped. “Look, quick!”

Billy looked, and there, in her plump hand, lay a diamond as clear as crystal, sparkling like a sun-kissed dewdrop, and evidently of great value.

“They are all diamonds!” cried the excited girl, as she hastily examined the remaining contents of Sidi’s packet. “And you are rich — as rich as Dr. Dean, only ever so much more so. Oh, brother! What shall we do with it all?”

“I think,” replied the young lieutenant, slowly, as through striving to repress a tumult of feeling, “that I shall start at once for Philadelphia.”

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